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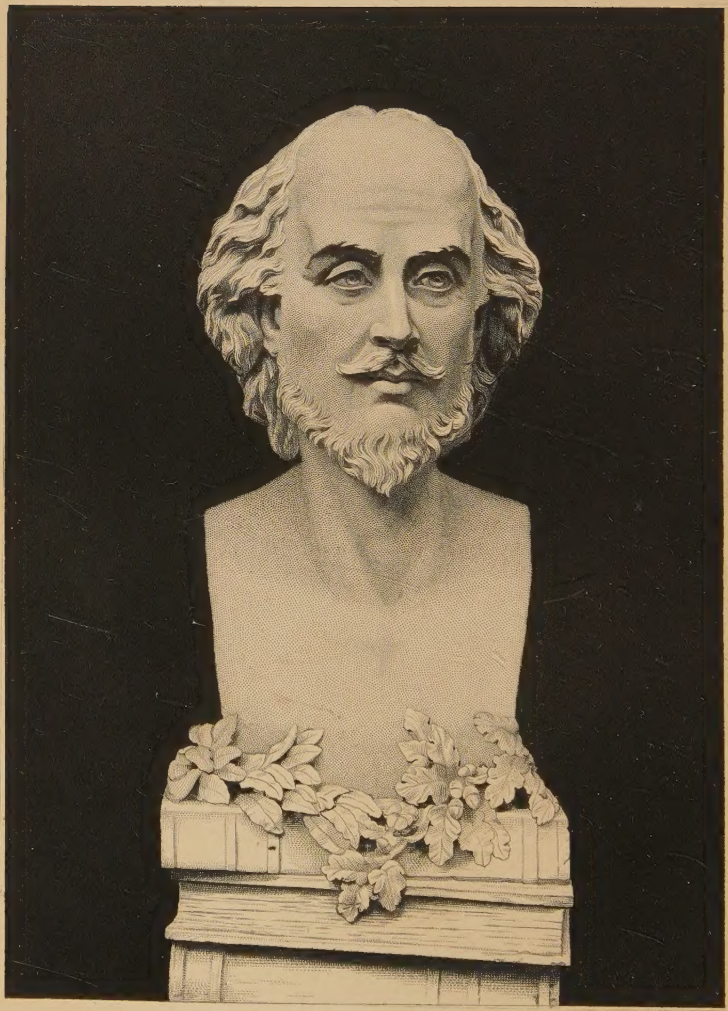
SHAKSPERE

His Inner Life

AS INTIMATED IN HIS WORKS

LONDON:
ROBSON AND SON, GREAT NORTHERN PRINTING WORKS,
PANCRAS ROAD, N.W.



H.Adlard. sc.

From the Colossal Tercentenary Bust of Shakspere.

BY CHARLES BACON, ESQ.

SHAKSPERE

His Inner Life

AS INTIMATED IN HIS WORKS

BY

JOHN A. HERAUD

Hwæt thu ece God, eac gemengest tha heofoncundan hither with eorthan; saula with lice siththan wuniath: this eorthlice and thæt ece samod, saul in flæsce. Hwæt hi simle to the hiona fundiath, forthæm hi hider of the æror comon; sculon eft to the. KING ALFRED

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TO

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

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ETC.

WHOSE COPIOUS AND LUCID ILLUSTRATIONS OF HOMER AND THE HOMERIC AGE ENTITLE HIM TO THAT EMINENCE AMONG SCHOLARS WHICH HIS DISTINGUISHED PUBLIC SERVICES HAVE SECURED AMONG STATESMEN,

The following Work,

IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT,

IS INSCRIBED

BY

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

—o—

Taste, as the reflex of Genius, follows the law of the greater light by which it is informed; but, relieved from the labour of creation, it has leisure to contemplate a variety, and to compare together a number of products. Taste, accordingly, frequently complains of defect. Failing to find in one work of genius what has existed in another, it contrasts the present with the past. Taste and Genius being present in the same individual, the former controls the quality of production, and the Artist becomes critical, the Critic becomes artistic. In schools of Art both are united, originating an organon of criticism which ultimately outgrows mere Art-limits, penetrates the domain of philosophy, regulates the sequence of thought, and prescribes a method to the order of our ideas. In this manner a Kant and other system-mongers are generated. Criticism then attains a dignity which entitles it to enter into the very conception and execution of high works of art; as it did into Schiller's later dramas, such as *Wallenstein*, *The Maid of Orleans*, *Wilhelm Tell*, *Marie Stuart*, and *The Bride of Messina*. It is one of the marvellous facts connected with Shakspere's works, that, not only in general structure, but minute detail, they practically anticipate the rules of philosophical criticism, and compel us not only to admire his original genius but his inborn taste. If one is inspiration, the other is instinct. The poet's mind displays an automatic action, especially true

of the spiritual organism, though attended by self-consciousness at every step of its manifestation.

The union of Taste and Genius in one personality marks a man whose observation is equal to his more abstract powers; one who, like Leonardo da Vinci for instance, not only thought intensely, but studied objects with unwearied diligence. The creative impulses of true genius are much aided by the operations of taste. In youth, poets commence with imitation, and in their progress become more and more original. Many, unless stimulated by example, would never have attained to the consciousness of hidden power. It is the same with Art as with Life. The associated forces of the observing mind with the observed object make the latter a portion of the intelligence that it helps to form, to excite, and to develope. In the history of Art-progress the constant inherence of the past in the present is also exemplified. In the commencement of the sixteenth century a confluence of various tendencies had begun to act on each other with remarkable power. Classic, Christian, social art thus intermingled in poetry as well as in painting. The influences of that period have since blended with those of intervening centuries, and others of the present will enter into combination with still newer elements in the future. Taste, being essentially of an eclectic character, proceeds by selecting points in the works submitted to it; united with genius it reproduces such points in unexpected combinations. With nature, also, the same privilege of selection is claimed by the gifted artist, and with the happiest results. Taste in art implies progress in art. Genius, as the productive principle, works like Love, prior to reasoning, and independent of judgment. Taste comes after, and is subordinate to both. It, however, implies a mind naturally predisposed to its exercise. In every acceptable work, there must be a manifest obedience to law—law self-imposed, but suggested by the consistency which makes itself felt in every well-designed and well-executed product. Neither poet nor artist may despise

rules, even when he "snatches a grace" beyond them. An exception may be permitted; but what is absurdly called "the wild extravagance of genius" offends the connoisseur. Nothing of this appears in the genuine Shaksperian dramas; and to disabuse the mind of hasty or prejudiced readers that examples are discoverable in them of such excesses, formed no small part of the purpose designed in the projection of the present work.

But we must guard against the opposite error, that desirable results are obtainable by the mere study of technical rules of art, or the technical terms of philosophy. Only the practical working out of the laws within us, and the practical edification of the moral reason by a perpetual exercise of its noble functions, in obedience to an enlightened conscience, and in harmony with an energetic will made strong by constant exercise, can avail to produce those immortal works in which Taste and Genius combine. The authority of Reason must, in the severest manner, govern and prevail in the general purpose and the variety of detail. Imagination may astonish, and fancy dazzle; but to delight, they must confess their allegiance to natural and moral laws, any transgression of which impairs the beauty and lessens the influence of an art-product.

Nor let us mistake, for either the moral or rational, the conventional manners or opinions of any place or period. These frequently, by pretending to a delicacy merely artificial, prove themselves to be most indelicate. Some such mistake led Voltaire into his absurd opinions concerning Shakspere's genius and works. Time has vindicated the poet and punished the critic. But the errors of the latter appear occasionally in our journalists, and show that they still survive in vulgar minds. But that taste which should always be identified with practical reason will not substitute the laws of any time or country for those autonomies of the moral being which give motive to human action, and in which Shakspere found the

leading ideas which are so copiously and lucidly illustrated in his later dramas.

Having been a reader of the Elizabethan poets from his twelfth to his sixty-fifth year, the author may have contracted a sort of partiality for their manner of thinking and style of composition; but having also, as a professional critic during a great portion of the same period, reviewed an indefinite number of modern works, he may, he thinks, reasonably indulge in the belief that he has gone through enough of general study to preserve him from a mere one-sided estimate of the literature of that remarkable period. In the hope that his reader will ultimately unite with him in this conclusion, he ventures to commend the following pages to his careful perusal.

J. A. H.

London, Jan. 1865.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION.

THERE are men whose names are written on the page of history, as it were, in large type, who nevertheless in their own day were not perceived to be of more than ordinary size. We contemplate them in the glass of time, which in such cases has a magnifying power, and operates on its objects like the microscope on the minute shapes of creation. The medium does not deceive us; it merely increases the force of vision, and thereby enlarges, or brings nearer to the eye, the forms that we would investigate. Thus we are enabled to take a fuller and truer view of the merits of the heroes of the past than was possible to their contemporaries; because we can contemplate the former in their entire proportions, and see more of them than could be witnessed by the latter. Their life and their works from birth to death are before us, and not merely a portion of either; so, knowing all (or all that can be known), we have the advantage even of wiser men who could only know a part. Of such typical or representative men was WILLIAM SHAKSPERE; a man who, though greatly respected, was

evidently not appreciated according to the plenitude of his merits, in his lifetime; but who occupies a wider and a wider space in critical esteem, as the successive ages empower his fellow-men to estimate him and his times with increased capacity of vision and judgment. As the generations develope in intelligence and morals, so his fame, and that of other mighty spirits like him, necessarily receive augmentation. The contemplative mind grows from century to century; and observation, with practice, and by means of facilities which increased experience continually supplies, acquires an instrumentality and a habit, by aid of which what was once secret or neglected is brought into light, and added to the stock of former knowledge. And by this process old fames are benefited, and what had already grown into giant stature, finally becomes even titanic. As nebulæ are dissolved into stars by artificial aid, so the dark places of character or circumstance gradually clear themselves of obscurity, as the accumulated science and wisdom of ages improve the perception of the reverential inquirer. The capacity of the average mind becomes recipient of the greatness of particular great minds in the distant and more distant past, and measures it according to the measure of an improved judgment and by means of rules that repeated application renders easier of employment. Thus apparently the men of old grow into heroes and demi-gods;—but, if we reflect a little, we shall find that it is the observers of the present day who have really advanced in power and importance; and who, in acknowledg-

ing the greatness of the world's earliest teachers, only prove how great they have themselves become, by means of the mysterious influence which, like a disembodied spirit, has survived the first immediate teaching, and acted ever since as an inspiration on the minds of successive races.

In the mean while the object, that has thus apparently enlarged, remains the same in itself. It was as great essentially in the beginning, as it is now;—but the power of appreciation in the many was less, and they saw less than we now see of that excellence, the magnitude of which they had not acquired the ability to apprehend. Only minds like Jonson's, that stood nearly on the same level with his own, properly understood the merits of Shakspere. And the terms in which this recognition is expressed are as wonderful as the fact:

> "Triumph, my Britain! thou hast one to show,
> To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe:
> He was not of an age, but for all time."

Marvellous was the greatness of Jonson, that could so sympathise with the greatness of a contemporary. It is observable also, that he gives Shakspere credit for Art as well as Nature,—a truth not perceived until the nineteenth century, and then insisted on by another great mind, that of Coleridge. It marks a certain inferiority in Milton that he did not perceive this truth; but contrasted the flow of Shakspere's "easy numbers" with those produced by "slow-endeavouring art." If, however, we are to believe Jonson, this same "slow-endeavouring art" was prac-

tised by Shakspere. "He," says the sturdy and right-thinking Ben,

> "Who casts to write a living line, must sweat
> (Such as thine are), and strike the second heat
> Upon the Muses' anvil; turn the same
> (And himself with it), that he thinks to frame;
> Or for the laurel he may gain a scorn:
> For a good poet's made, as well as born,—
> And such wert thou."

It is true that this statement somewhat militates against that made in the Players' Preface to the first folio edition of Shakspere's works,—which preface is supposed to have been written by Jonson,—and records that Shakspere, "as he was a happy imitator of Nature, was a most gentle expresser of it. His mind and hand went together; and what he thought he uttered with that easiness, that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers." The fact is no doubt truly stated; but it is probable that those "papers" were fair copies, not the original draughts; such copies, in fact, as are now made for theatres of new plays, in order to their performance. The original draughts are scarcely fit for such an office, and would certainly never be used. Such copies, too, are liable to inaccuracies; and, so far as the eldest folio was printed from such, we may account in this way for many of the manifest errors in it. That it was not altogether printed from them, we know, notwithstanding the boast to the contrary made in the preface; for in many of the plays the errors are continued which originated with the "divers stolen and surreptitious copies, maimed and deformed by the frauds and

stealths of injurious impostors," which the preface affects to condemn. That preface, in fact, is a mere publisher's advertisement, affixed to the folio in order to promote its sale, albeit it was signed by the players, and probably written by Jonson.

These few remarks may serve to symbolise the amount of uncertainty and misrepresentation, both of friends and foes, against which the fame of Shakspere has had to struggle. We do not, indeed, yet directly know what works are his and what are not; nor is there any recognised external testimony which can satisfy a logical mind. The reflective reader, therefore, is fain to procure, from a careful perusal of the various works attributed to the poet, such internal evidence as may enable him to fix approximately the value of external proof, and to correct the errors of historians and biographers. The result of such a process is, of course, dependent in a great degree on the mind of the inquirer. Its predilections, associations, *à priori* conditions, extent of knowledge, and state of opinion (to say nothing of its genius or its taste), are all elements that enter into the argument, mingle with the premises, and affect the conclusions derived from it and them. Coleridge, Ulrici, Gervinus, and others,* have attempted this task for themselves, and as a needful portion of it, have endeavoured not only to decide what plays are Shakspere's, but the chronological order of their

---

* Victor Hugo has also given a classification in his book entitled *William Shakespeare;* but his classification is altogether so wild and disorderly that it defies analysis. That work, indeed, is a magnificent rhapsody, but neither critical nor accurate in its statements

composition. This latter duty I have found to be the necessary antecedent to all other inquiry; and many years ago, having gone through all the evidence at my command, I arrived at a specific arrangement, as having the balance of probability in its favour. To this end, it was expedient that I should estimate not only the mere inner evidence, but the Inner Life of the productions examined. I had to settle what Life was; and to trace it from mere individuation to individuality; rising from the inorganic to the organic in the former, according to its different degrees, and in the latter, threading the folds of the historical and fantastic, taking note of comic peculiarities, and aiming at the heights of Ideal characterisation, whether simple, complex, or spiritual. This, however, was rather the metaphysical than the chronological table, though lying at the root of it, and will be better given at an advanced stage of the discussion. For the present I will content myself with dividing the table of the most probable chronological arrangement of Shakspere's plays into four periods. The first, the Elementary and Impulsive; the second, the Historical and Fantastic; the third, the Comic; and the fourth, the Epic and Imaginative,—the fourth displaying itself in two forms, namely, (1) Simple Construction, and (2) Complex Structure; the last including (a) the conventional, (b) the universal, ideal and purely poetic, and finally (c) the abstract and intellectual in conception and treatment. Here follows

THE TABLE.

PLAYS.	Period of earliest mention, mean date, &c.	Probable period of composition.
I. ELEMENTARY AND IMPULSIVE PERIOD. 1585-1591.		
Two Gentlemen of Verona (Meres) . . .	1598	1585
Comedy of Errors (Meres)	1598	1586
Love's Labour's lost (Meres), printed 1598—performed Christmas 1597; alludes to Bank's Horse	1589 (m. d.).	1588
Hamlet (first sketch) printed 1603; a previous Hamlet, perhaps by Kyd, mentioned by Greene in 1587	1589 (m. d.).	1588
All's well that ends well (Meres)	1598	1590
Romeo and Juliet (first sketch), alludes to earthquake in 1580, dated eleven years before in play (Meres, printed)	1597	1591
II. HISTORICAL AND FANTASTIC PERIOD. 1591-1598.		
Henry VI., Part I.	1592	1591
Taming of the Shrew (acted)	1593	1592
Henry VI., Part II. (printed)	1594	1593
„ Part III. (printed)	1595	1594
Richard II. (Meres, printed)	1597	1595
Richard III. (Meres, printed)	1597	1595
King John (Meres)	1598	1596
Merchant of Venice (Meres)	1598	1596
Midsummer-Night's Dream (Meres) . . .	1598	1596
Henry IV., Part I. (Meres, printed) . . .	1598	1597
„ Part II. (printed)	1600	1598
Henry V. (printed)	1600	1598
III. COMIC PERIOD. 1599-1601.		
Much ado about Nothing (printed) . . .	1600	1599
As You like It (entered)	1600	1599
Merry Wives of Windsor (printed) . . .	1602	1601
Twelfth-Night (acted)	1602	1601
IV. EPIC AND IMAGINATIVE PERIOD. 1601-1613.		
1. *Simple Construction.*		
Othello (acted)	1602	1601
Measure for Measure (acted)	1604	1602

Plays.	Period of earliest mention, mean date, &c.	Probable period of composition.
2. *Complex Structure.*		
(a) *Conventional.*		
Lear (acted)	1607	1604
Troilus and Cressida (printed)	1609	1605
Cymbeline (acted)	1610	1606
Winter's Tale (acted)	1611	1607
(b) *Universal, Ideal, and purely Poetic.*		
Macbeth	1610	1608
Coriolanus (printed 1623)	—	1608
Julius Cæsar (ditto)	—	1609
Antony and Cleopatra (ditto)	—	1609
(c) *Abstract and Intellectual.*		
Tempest (acted)	1611	1610
Timon of Athens (printed 1623)	—	1611
Henry VIII. (ditto)	—	1612
Globe Theatre destroyed, 29th June 1613.		

In this chronological arrangement of Shakspere's compositions some help, but not much, is obtained from a work of a learned contemporary, called Meres, whose name occurs several times in the above table. It was in the year 1598 that Meres gave a list of twelve of Shakspere's plays, as being then in existence. They are as follow: *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labour's lost*, *All's well that ends well*, *King John*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Midsummer-Night's Dream*, *Henry IV.*, *Richard II.*, *Richard III.*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. These data, nevertheless, are of great relative importance, as enabling us approximately to adjust the periods of composition in regard

to the plays mentioned. But in order for it to lead to satisfactory results, this task must be conducted in connection with an investigation of the internal evidence, by a careful examination of the dramas themselves.

"Francis Meres" was "Maister of Artes of both Universities;" so the author calls himself in the title-page of the book, which is named *Palladis Tamia, Wit's Treasury; being the Second Part of Wit's Commonwealth.* The imprint to the work is, "London: printed by P. Short, for Cuthbert Burbie, 1598." Meres was a clergyman, and called by Heywood an "approved good scholar." He was also a schoolmaster, and compiled schoolbooks. To this production is appended a brief essay, called "A comparative Discourse of our English Poets with the Greek, Latin, and Italian Poets," in which Shakspere's name is mentioned nine times. No play at the date of the book had yet been published with Shakspere's name; nevertheless Meres speaks of his dramas as well known. The following are some of the passages relating to Shakspere:

"The English tongue is mightily enriched and gorgeouslie invested in rare ornaments and resplendent abiliments by Sir Philip Sidney, Spenser, Daniel, Drayton, Warner, Shakespeare, Marlow, and Chapman." "As the soul of Euphorbus was thought to live in Pythagoras, so the sweete, wittie soul of Ovid lives in mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare. Witness his *Venus and Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, his sugred Sonnets among his private friends." "Shakespeare,

among the English, is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage. For comedy, witness *Gentlemen of Verona*,* his *Errors*, his *Love's Labour's lost*, his *Love's Labour's wonne* [or, *All's well that ends well?*], his *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, and his *Merchant of Venice*. For tragedy, his *Richard the II.*, *Richard the III.*, *Henry the IV.*, *King John*, *Titus Andronicus*, and his *Romeo and Juliet*."

Meres, it must be recollected, only writes according to report, and not on the authority of a printed title-page. It is needful to remark this, as I dispute the authorship of *Titus Andronicus*, and do not admit it to be Shakspere's. In the same year, however, in which the *Palladis Tamia* was issued, its publishers supplied the public with a printed copy of *Love's Labour's lost*, "as it was presented before her Highness this last Christmas," "newly corrected and augmented by William Shakespere." The author had at length obtained the insertion of his name on a title-page. The example was followed by other publishers. Andrew Wise, for example, lost no time in reissuing *Richard II.* and *Richard III.* with the like distinction. In the same year, however, *The Historie of Henrie the Fourth, with the humourous conceits of Sir John Falstaffe*, had been evulgated anonymously by the same publisher, who resided in "Paule's Churchyard, at the sign of the Angell."

Before concluding this Introduction, it is expedient I should mention that a spiteful writer of Shake-

* It is worthy of notice that Meres mentions *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* in the first place.

spere's age has satirically recorded the events of his life in a brief but pregnant sentence, worth all the traditions to which his biographers have given such undue prominence. The passage occurs in a curious tract, dated 1605-6, and entitled *Ratseis Ghost.* Ratsey was a highwayman who was executed at Bedford in March 1606; and in this tract he is supposed to counsel the leading player of a strolling company to try his fortunes in London, in the following terms: "There thou shalt learn to be frugal (for players were never so thrifty as they are now about London); and to feed upon all men, to let none feed upon thee, to make thy hand a stranger to thy pocket, thy heart slow to perform thy tongue's promise, and when thou feelest thy purse well lined, buy thee some place of lordship in the country, that, growing weary of playing, thy money may then bring thee to dignity and reputation, that thou needest care for no man; no, not for them that before made thee proud with speaking their words on the stage." To which advice the player is made to reply: "Sir, I thank you for this good counsel. I promise you I will make use of it; for I have heard, indeed, of some that have gone to London very meanly, and have come in time to be exceeding wealthy." The allusions here refer unmistakably to Shakspere; and these translated out of the language of malignant satire into that of sober fact, trace the life-progress of the poet exactly in the manner more fully developed in the following pages. The name of the writer of the tract is unknown; but he was evidently some playwright, envious of Shak-

spere's reputation, and probably one who had written a play in which Shakspere had acted.

> "Envy will Merit as its shade pursue,
> And like the shadow prove the substance true."

At the period when this nameless lampooner discharged his venom on his worthier contemporary, Shakspere had yet to write *Lear*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Macbeth*, *Coriolanus*, *Julius Cæsar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Tempest*, *Timon of Athens*, and *Henry the Eighth*. These great, perhaps the greatest, of his works, were produced when he had attained to a serene condition of life, and had no longer to strive with fortune. They bear witness to what Juvenal states of easy circumstances being expedient for the poet. All are marked with the happy audacity which distinguishes a prosperous independence, and show a "sovereign sway and masterdom," only pertaining to those who have conquered a position in the world, and know themselves able to maintain it.

Thenceforth Shakspere, during his life, had little to suffer from envy and slander. But after his death his memory was assailed by both. No cosmic mind—and such was Shakspere's—but has to prove its mission by successfully surviving the opposition of antagonist forces in the intellectual world, the battle-field wherein the wars of Truth and Beauty—which is the full and complete expression of Truth, or the Lovelike—are waged against Error and Imperfection. That such men as Dryden, the Earl of Shaftesbury, and Voltaire, should be among his post-

humous calumniators, proves that, in whatever degree, the lesser intelligence is always an enemy to the greater. The spiritual man can endure and compassionate the natural man, because he comprehends him; but the natural man, not being able to discern spiritual things, usually hates the mind to whom they are familiar. He is irritated by being virtually taunted with his blindness, sometimes indeed voluntary, when he thinks that he sees well enough, and resists the guidance of a superior as an insult. He hates the privileges that he can or will not enjoy, and, as one means of abrogating them, ignores their existence. Dryden, Shaftesbury, Voltaire, demonstrate their inferiority to Shakspere, whose existence they were compelled to recognise, but whose merit they failed to appreciate. Failure—fatal to them!—indifferent to him, whose greatness it only served to attest more strongly. There is always an opposition between the different classes of mind, each class representing certain degrees of development;—for even in the individual mind the same contest prevails between the faculties represented by them. The reason meets with contradiction from the intellect, and the intellect from the senses; so that the philosopher, the savant, and the mere observer, bear a different testimony, the two former affirming what the last ignores, and the second denying or questioning the principles of which the first is thoroughly assured. This happens because the first has the largest sphere, inclusive of the others, and the last the smallest.

We find, on fully investigating the works of Shakspere, that he has the highest and the broadest mind; and that it is owing to its breadth and elevation that other minds, though great, yet not so great as his, have miscalculated its power and its proportions. From these misapprehensions proceeded the martyrdom of the Hebrew prophets, whose tombs, on after reflection, were nevertheless erected in the Salem wherein they suffered. Nor were the poets of Greece exempt from the operation of this law. Æschylus was banished from Athens, and died in exile;—then the repentant city raised to his memory a statue of bronze. Milton appears to have convinced for a time English half-thinkers that men of genius *need* no monument, and Shakespere least of any, whose works would prove sufficient for his fame. They have done so. But Athens felt that if her poet *needed* no memorial, yet *she* needed one,—if only as an atonement for neglect or wrong. But higher reasons command this species of recognition: as an acknowledgment to Providence for the gift of a man of genius to a nation; as an assurance that such nation in some sort merits such a gift, if only for having the capacity to appreciate its value; and as an evidence that the state has done its duty by the people, in providing for them an education which enables them to admire and to appropriate the teachings of the most philosophical and religious of poets. The national ingratitude which neglects so obvious a duty is a species of impiety, which, worse than blasphemy, assails the

throne of the Eternal; treats with despite the ministers whom He has sent forth out of the bosom of the Infinite to enlighten and redeem the lost in the dark wastes and narrow prisons of time; and relegates to perpetual ignorance, concerning the highest and holiest of man's relations with the universe, the multitude who are condemned by their poverty, unless helped by their rulers, to "sit in darkness and the shadow of death." Now that the conscience of the people has been awakened to the shame of this continued indifference to the services rendered by poets and sages to our country and the world, as the founders of the civilisation which, onward from the sixteenth century, has laboured to ameliorate the condition of mankind, it will be no longer safe to defer to an indefinite period the public expression of that thankfulness which it would be no less than ignominious for the nation not at heart at all times to feel. The people will not consent to be supposed guilty of complicity with the powerful and wealthy, who (though invited and guaranteed in a worthy work by the magnates of their own order, associated with literary names of high eminence) have declined to contribute from their ample means to the support of a sentiment in which, however honourable to the mind that entertains it, they took no special interest. Oh, how can they who serve Mammon serve God? But there are hearts,—there are souls,—in some "poor men's cottages," which should have been "princes' palaces," whereinto the poet's words, like

living powers, have deeply sunk; and they will demand, for the sake of England, that honour should at length be rendered where honour is due. They will demand it, not by vain menace nor by vainer violence, but by the greater force of example. They are about to subscribe their pennies, and will thus compel the children of Mammon to subscribe their pounds.

Meanwhile, what are the Government and Parliament doing? Awaiting the Voice of the People. *Vox populi, vox Dei.*

PART I.

ELEMENTARY AND IMPULSIVE PERIOD.

1585-1591.

CHAPTER I.

Shakspere as a sonneteer — The true theory concerning his Sonnets — His protest against celibacy, and his testimony in favour of the Reformation — His "Venus and Adonis" — "Tarquin and Lucrece" — Poetical view of Shakspere's works — "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" — Shakspere travels to London — His first impressions — Mechanical arrangements in the structure of his plays — Shakspere's education and classical learning — "The Comedy of Errors" — "Love's Labour's lost" — Games of the revived learning advocated — "Hamlet" — Thomas Kyd's "Spanish Tragedy" — "The Historie of Hamblet" — "All's well that ends well" — The supernatural and comedies — "Romeo and Juliet" — Brooke's poem — Books read by Shakspere — The Shepherdess Felismena — Idealising the real.

Every man who has won an immortal name has a spiritual life in the world's memory, which is not only as real as the actual physical life of the best of his posterity, but exerts even more influence on the opinions and actions of mankind. He lives in his works, which, in their completed state, give the result of his mature thought; and that result, entering as a power into the minds of successive doers and thinkers, not only aids in their education, but modifies their character, colours their feeling, and directs their conduct. The actual man has passed away, but the ideal man exists in an imperishable medium, and from age to age gradually assumes proportions more and more godlike; so that at length it comes to pass, that he sways our spirits from his urn, and verily reigns a monarch in a spiritual kingdom. Of the names that have thus become sacred, few maintain a place supe-

rior to that of Shakspere. Like that of the greatest benefactors of the race, it has already become a myth; the little that is furnished by his biography having been augmented by the imagination of his worshippers, until countless volumes have developed themselves out of the small germ of fact with which mere history is compelled to rest contented. All that is known of William Shakspere may be stated in a sentence or two. That he was born at Stratford-upon-Avon, married, and had children there; went to London, became an actor, wrote poems and plays, returned to Stratford, lived on the competency he had earned, made his will, and died,—is all that is certainly known. Even upon some, and the most important part of this, doubt has been recently thrown. The authorship of his works has been attributed to others, and nothing left to him but the temporary management of a theatre, and the occasional acting on its stage. *The* Shakspere, however, of whom I am about to discourse, is the man who was the Poet and the Dramatist; and, wanting in the detail of his outer life, I find refuge in his works, and therein trace his Inner Life, of which those works were the product and the symbol.

We know not where the poet was educated, nor how he was occupied in early youth; but we meet with mention of him as a sonneteer in 1598, when he was thirty-four years of age. Those Sonnets had then been in circulation for a considerable time, and other poems and plays (though the latter anonymously) had been published many years before; the

Sonnets themselves appear not to have been printed until eleven years afterwards. These Sonnets are felt by all to be in some sort revelations of the poet's Inner Life. I have written on them at length in a paper contributed to the *Temple-Bar Magazine*, and endeavoured to develop their meaning. They are evidently composed on the plan adopted by Petrarch and Dante, in which, under pretence of the passion of love, aspirations after political liberty, and free thought in religion, were disguised. Other works of Shakspere have, though generally unsuspected, a similar hidden meaning, such as *Measure for Measure*, *Love's Labour's lost*, *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, &c. He is a thorough-going Protestant by anticipation, and one even of extreme opinions, as might be proved by numerous citations. The Sonnets need only be read in the order in which they are usually printed, to become intelligible at once to any one who has any idea of the inner meaning in Italian productions of the same kind.

They compose one poem, commencing with an elaborate protest against Celibacy, and vindicating nature's bounty and wisdom in the institution of marriage. These are addressed to a supposed celibate, who is implored to forego the monstrous pretence. The poet strongly argues against it as a violation of nature's law, and an enemy to succession; whereas with nature all is generation and progress, and provision for the future continuance of races. By reproduction, man obtains an advantage over death. By declining to reproduce, he forsakes his

post, and loses the battle. Such a coward, the poet treats with bitter irony, condemning him of "murderous shame" and "murderous hate." He is both a suicide and an assassin.

His beneficent Creator, however, had purposed him for something better. He had been made fair, gracious, and gentle, and naturally disposed to be kind-hearted; and as he had himself a father, should return the obligation by having a son, who would better vouch for his parent's personal attractions than even the poet's most enthusiastic praises. Beauty, according to the poet, is peculiarly the attribute of man (as in *Hamlet*, "In action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the *beauty of the world*—the paragon of animals"). Love he appropriates to woman. Man is with him the aristocrat, soft of feature, white of hand, the desire of the female heart, and the source of her supremest joy; and while he broods on the subject, he raises the object he is all along apostrophising into an Ideal. The type-man, and the universal humanity, gradually substitutes the individual. The shortcoming of the latter in his own person the poet laments; but at the same time he rejoices in his association with the former, even while confessing the wide difference between them. This difference he paints under the figure of *absence*, likening the Ideal to an absent friend, whose inevitable loss is the source of unavailing regret.

But this ideal, while removed from masculine contemplation, is present to the female mind; and

the poet, accordingly, feigns jealousy of an ideal woman who has engrossed the attention of his ideal man. This leads him to consider the relations of the sexes, and to indulge in some exquisite comparisons and reflections. And now his thoughts begin to soar;—ultimately, his ideal passes into the divine. The immortal man in a mortal body is to him a source of exultation and sorrow. The complex state of mind in which he now finds himself brings also its special trouble. His absent ideal man has not only a mistress, but has obtained another friend;—so that envy is added to jealousy. He next justifies this conduct of his absent and beloved acquaintance, whose superiority of character of itself transcends censure, and invests whatever he does with its own sacredness. For his truth is as indisputable as his beauty, and our doubts of either arise from imperfection in us, not in him. It is, indeed, the Platonic *Logos*, into whom his imagination has transformed the Removed Object of his poetic apostrophe.

At length, the poet excuses his own wanderings during his enforced absence from his friend. Compared with his Divine Ideal, he himself is altogether wanting in integrity. He is not a whole man, but only a part of man. He is merely a professional person, not absolute man, grown to full stature and exercising all faculties indifferently. He is reduced to the level of his occupation:

> "Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
> And almost thence my nature is subdued
> To what it works in, like the dyer's hand."

I need not point out to the qualified reader that such reflections are in the very spirit of Socrates, as recorded in the Dialogues of Plato, and that the argument of the Sonnets follows the course of dialectics generally adopted by the Grecian sage. The sonnets that succeed those which I have just briefly analysed assume a more religious character; and we have much scriptural reference, and such definitions of Divine Love as were never exceeded. The Man has become a Messiah, and the Woman the Church. The former retains his fairness, but the latter is depicted as black. She is, in fact, the black but comely bride of Solomon. But her comeliness is now fatally obscured—she has deified herself, and placed her celestial friend at disadvantage. Both claim the allegiance of Shakspere,—his "female evil" and his "better angel:"

> "The better angel is a *man* right fair,
> The worser spirit, a *woman*, coloured ill.
> To win me soon to hell, my female evil
> Tempteth my better angel from my side,
> And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,
> Wooing his purity with her foul pride."

Thus it is that Shakspere parabolically opposed the Mariolatry of his time to the purer devotion of the Word of God, which it was the mission of his age to inaugurate.

I have dwelt the more on this interpretation of Shakspere's Sonnets, because the vulgar notion of Shakspere is that of a profane player, who, by reason of circumstances, grew into a poet and dramatist; and not an original mind that naturally developed

itself into poetry, and knew itself to be degraded by its professional habits. The Sonnets confirm the contrary of all this, and show a mind well furnished with philosophy, well instructed in theology, and animated with political aspirations that looked forward alike to the regeneration of the Church and the World. We no longer see a mind indifferent to religion, and alive only to a particular art through which it arrives at greatness; but a great mind, armed with knowledge, and inspired by genius, that condescends to work in a selected channel, and contracts itself to the condition of its office. In this, as in his other poems, *Venus and Adonis*, *Tarquin and Lucrece*, and his exquisite lyrics, I perceive the profound, energetic, and philosophical mind,—without which, as Coleridge has recorded, Shakspere "might have pleased, but could not have been a great dramatic poet."

There are a few outer facts of his life that can be depended on.

William Shakspere was the son of John Shakspere, a resident of Stratford, who married Mary the youngest daughter of Robert Arden of Willmecote, in the parish of Aston Cauntlow, and a descendant of the Robert Arden who was groom of the chamber to Henry VII. John Shakspere was a thriving woolstapler, who at the age of twenty-six was rich enough to purchase two copyhold houses and gardens and a croft, and the following year was made a burgess of the corporation of Stratford. Next year we find him one of the four constables of Stratford, and in 1559

he gained the office of affeeror, whose duty it was to fix and determine the fines leviable for offences against the bye-laws of the borough. In 1561 he was one of the municipal chamberlains; and in 1564 he was a member of the Common Hall of Stratford. These facts prove that Shakspere's parents were eminently respectable, and at the time of his birth in prosperous circumstances.

William Shakspere was baptised on the 26th April 1564, and is supposed to have been born on the 23d, the anniversary of the tutelary saint of England, St. George. In this year the plague raged in Stratford, even from the last day of June to that of December, destroying two hundred and thirty-eight of its inhabitants. John Shakspere appears to have been a good accountant, for he officiated on many occasions as actuary for the corporation, on behalf of the chamberlains;—a fact which is illustrative of our Shakspere, who, being a prudent and prosperous man, probably inherited this acquisition from his father. In the year 1565, John Shakspere was elected one of the fourteen aldermen of Stratford, and in 1571 attained the highest dignity by being chosen chief alderman.*

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* The house in Henley Street, Stratford, in which Shakspere is supposed to have been born, is now the property of the British nation. His father was then in the habit of making donations to the poor of the borough. Other proofs of prosperity may be cited. In 1564, we find in "the accompt" rendered by "John Tayler and John Shakspeyr, chamburlens," the following entry: "Item, payd to Shakspeyr, for a pec tymbur, iij*s*." On January of the same year, "the chambur is found in arrerage, and ys in det unto John Shakspeyr, 1*l*. 5*s*. 8*d*." On

To quit this digression, however, and to turn again from the pursuit of the alderman's fortunes to the consideration of the works of the dramatist, involving as they do the highest principles of the art in which the son of the woolstapler became the greatest master yet acknowledged by the world.

William Shakspere, the poet, wrote his life in his works. Taking what may be called a biological view of these, we may read his life there in its innermost meaning. Thus instructed, with some outward aids, I think that I can fix the chronological succession of his compositions. His first work I apprehend to have been *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, probably produced in 1585, that is in the twenty-first year of his age. Three years previously, Shakspere had wedded Anne Hathaway; and, having thus early begun life as a man, we might expect to find but little of the boy in this composition. The practical life had, at any rate, preceded the contemplative with him, and the latter as yet was elementary. It had not yet

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30th August 1564, he "payd towards the releefe of the poore" twelve pence; on September 6th, sixpence; on September 27th, again sixpence; and on October 20th, eight pence. In 1565, at a hall holden, we find—"Item: payd to Shakspeyr, for a rest of old det, 3*l.* 2*s.* 7*d.*" "In this accompt the chamber ys in det unto John Shakspeyr, to be payd unto hym by the next chamburlens, 6*s.* 4*d.*" In 1566, John Shakspere appears, in two precepts of the Stratford Court of Record, of this year's date, as the surety of Richard Hathaway—thus showing an early connexion between the family of Hathaway and of Shakspere. Finally, in 1570, John Shakspere held under William Clopton the tenancy of Ingon Meadow, "a parcel of land" of fourteen acres in extent, for which, with its appurtenances, he paid an annual rent of 8*l.*

arrived at full expression; it wanted organism. It wanted more. It was not only inorganic; it was not even thoroughly mechanical. A deficient mechanism runs through the conduct of this 'prentice play. Whatever its shortcomings, however, Shakspere's fortunes probably depended on its success; for in the year which we have attributed to its production, biographers fix the first visit of the poet to London, whither it is supposed he had journeyed to try his luck, and benefit his family; for already he was the father of three children. The nascent artist had incurred responsibilities, which probably he now depended upon his art to enable him to discharge. Whether this play added immediately to his means may be doubted; for the earliest mention of it dates thirteen years later, nine years before which time he had produced the first sketch of his *Hamlet.* Meanwhile he had become not only an actor and playwright, but a shareholder in the Blackfriars' theatre. Probably to these characters he had added that of the patriot; for in the previous year (1588), the Spanish Armada had threatened his native shores, and been providentially dispersed by a violent tempest. It has been well observed that, in that Armada, superstition and slavery had combined their forces; and that the heart of the future author of *Henry V.* must have beat high as he watched the grim unity of defiance which had bound together all classes of men in England against the common foe, and the wild enthusiasm which the tidings of their destruction had kindled throughout the length and breadth of the land.

His mental development, however, had not arrived at this point when *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* was written. We find in it the first workings of imagination, in connexion with the theme dearest to youth, that of love. It contains references to the first impressions of travel on youthful wanderers who have left home in order to see the world. We may transfer these impressions to Shakspere himself, who, having quitted Avon for the Thames, had commenced his pilgrimage, choosing rather

> "To see the wonders of the world abroad,
> Than, living dully sluggardized at home,
> Wear out his youth in shapeless idleness."

He had felt he could "not be a perfect man, not being tried and tutored in the world." He thought it good at court to "practise tilts and tournaments, hear sweet discourse, converse with noblemen, and be in eye of every exercise worthy his youth, and"—for we need not shrink from applying the conclusion of the quotation also—"nobleness of birth." The spirit of poetry to Shakspere was now as a new birth—a kind of regeneration eminently noble, as true to the intellectual as to the religious man.

As it was with Valentine and Proteus, even so was it with their poet; who, however, was more like the former than the latter, since he was then hunting after honour, not love. Love he had gratified at Stratford; in London he had come to win honour.

The poet shows in this play as one who had survived, and could therefore sport with, the passion of love. There is none of the tumult of *Romeo and*

Juliet in it; but there is much of gentle courtesy, such as accompanies the limited affections of conventional people. The young dramatist's imagination has not yet wandered far beyond his actual experience, and lingers within the pale of reasonable probability. What of romance there is in the story is borrowed from that of the shepherdess Felismena, contained in the second book of George de Montemayor's *Diana*, translated by Bartholomew Young in 1598; but which must have been known by some means to Shakspere before, since in that year Meres mentions *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* as a play generally esteemed; and it is likewise probable that a previous drama on the subject was also in existence.*

In the mechanical arrangement of this play, Shakspere invented or adopted a plan of which we have afterwards examples in his greater productions. The third act concludes a cycle of incidents, and a new one commences with the fourth. This arrangement offers many stage facilities, and it was afterwards improved on by Shakspere by an additional contrivance,—that of making the first act a complete cycle in itself. Where this is done, the result is a trilogy. Thus, in *Othello*, the initial act comprises the story of the Moor's marriage, the second and third the success of Iago's plot, and the fourth and fifth acts the sequel and consequences. A similar arrangement may be

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* Mr. P. Cunningham, in his *Revel Accounts*, mentions a "history," or drama, called *Felix and Philiomena*,—the latter being probably a misprint for 'Philismena.'

observed in *Hamlet*, *Coriolanus*, *Macbeth*, *Lear*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and more or less in other plays. In fact, the poet appears not to have departed from the method without a special reason. In other respects, the mechanical arrangement of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is somewhat awkward and arbitrary. Of organic structure it has comparatively nothing. There is but little indication of character, and the action grows not out of its development in the personages, whose conduct is as accidental and capricious as the circumstances in which they are placed. All this marks the play as a juvenile production, as do likewise the smoothness and correctness of the metre, which is written with mechanical carefulness, such as betokens the writer to be a learner in the art of versification, not a master of it, who could make free use of all its resources. But it also bears evidence to the writer being a well-educated man, with a certain amount of classical learning, and a very fair command of poetic commonplaces both in imagery and sentiment. But of original power there is little promise —little depth of thought or breadth of treatment. There is no daring, but rather a neatness in the general execution. In fine, we note as yet the timidity of one who depends as much upon imitation and propriety as upon creative impulse. It is rather a work of taste than of genius. It bears evidence, too, of the manner in which the poet had become early acquainted with stage performances in his native town and in Kenilworth, where pantomimes and other scenic displays were common in holiday seasons.

Here is the allusion to such exhibitions, in one of the speeches given to Julia, the heroine:

> "At Pentecost,
> When all our pageants of delight were played,
> Our youth got me to play the woman's part,
> And I was trimmed in Madam Julia's gown,
> Which served me as fit, by all men's judgment,
> As if the garment had been made for me;
> Therefore I know she is about my height.
> And at that time I made her weep a-good,
> For I did play a lamentable part.
> Madam, 'twas Ariadne, passioning
> For Theseus' perjury and unjust flight;
> Which I so lively acted with my tears,
> That my poor mistress, moved therewithal,
> Wept bitterly; and, would I might be dead,
> If I in thought felt not her very sorrow."

Shakspere himself in such village pageants probably took part; and thus commenced his first leaning towards the stage, and under such influences he composed his first play.

As tradition has uttered many scandals concerning the early period of our poet's life, I will here state all that is known to be fact.

We find as early as 1569 that the Queen's players and the Earl of Worcester's players visited Stratford, and performed in it. The former received nine shillings and the latter twelve pence out of the town's fund for their entertainment. The child Shakspere was thus brought within reach of the stage. Again, in 1573, "the Earl of Leicester's players" received from the Chamberlain of Stratford the sum of six shillings and eight pence. In 1574, "my lord of Warwick's players" are paid seventeen shillings, and the Earl of Worcester's players five shillings and seven

pence. Meanwhile John Shakspere's prosperity continues; and in 1575—(the year in which Queen Elizabeth made her grand historical visit to Kenilworth Castle, only thirteen miles distant from Stratford, and at which William Shakspere, then eleven years of age, is supposed to have been present)—he bought two freehold houses in Henley Street. But two years afterwards, his fortunes are supposed to have declined, as he is found to be irregular at the corporation meetings, and to have had one-half of his borough taxes remitted. In 1578 and 1579 matters appear to get worse and worse;*—though the indices in question are capable of another interpretation.

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* In 1578, it is found that John Shakespere and Mary, his wife, mortgaged the "land in Wilmecote called Asbies," to one Edmund Lambert, for 40*l.*, on condition that it should revert to them if repaid before Michaelmas day 1580. In 1578, and on the 19th November of that same year, it is arranged in the corporation books that John Shakespere and Robert Bratt, in regard to a levy of fourpence a week for relief of the poor, "shall not be taxed to pay any thing;" and it has further been found that in this year the aforesaid Edmund Lambert was security for a debt of 5*l.*, due to Mr. Roger Sadler, of Stratford, by Mr. John Shakespere. It seems, too, that about this time the interests held in the tenements at Snitterfield were parted with. In 1579, the sum, three shillings and fourpence, levied upon John Shakespere by the borough of Stratford, for the furnishing "of pikemen, billmen, and archers," is entered on the corporation books as "unpaid and unaccounted for;" yet, in a deed of the same date, he is designated a *yeoman*. There is reason, also, for somewhat modifying the conclusion that the family was so much distressed, in the fact that the fee paid this year for the bell and pall on the death of John Shakespere's daughter Anne, namely viij*d.*, was the highest in the list; and, indeed, Mr. Charles Knight questions the conclusion altogether. In his opinion, John Shakespere had now turned his attention to agriculture, and was living less in the borough, though still dwelling in the parish, as proprietor of the lands of Bishopton and Welcombe, which William Shakspere disposes of by his will under the designation of his inheritance.

William Shakspere was now fifteen years of age, and had another opportunity of witnessing a theatrical performance; for, in the latter year, the players of Lord Strange and of the Countess of Essex held dramatic entertainments in Stratford, in the hall of the guild, under the patronage of the bailiff. Next year another similar opportunity occurred. The players of the Earl of Derby, in 1580, visited Stratford. The character of the entertainment is described in the document as "set out with sweetness of words, fitness of epithets, with metaphors, allegories, hyperboles, amphibologies, similitudes, with phrases so picked, so pure, so proper, with action so smooth, so lively, so wanton,"—phrases which indicate a poetic drama of some excellence, and also an appreciative taste in the audience, which had already grown critical, and could distinguish the quality of its fare.

It is from this point that the beldame Tradition becomes calumnious. We have nothing evidential until the period of Shakspere's marriage. A citation already given proves that there was an old intimacy between the Hathaways and the Shaksperes; and this, in due time, ripened into affection. There was nothing clandestine or irregular in the love of William Shakspere for Anne Hathaway; but all was done with the consent of friends, who, on both sides, were eminently respectable. Shakspere at no period of his life descended from a higher to a lower level; but his course from the beginning was upward as well as onward, and all the breathings of his spirit were aspirations. His marriage-bond has fortunately been

found,* bearing date 28th November 1582. It states that Fulk Sandells and John Richardson, farmers, of Stratford, became bound in forty pounds "that William Shagspere, one thone partie, and Anne Hathwey, of Stratford, in the dioces of Worcester, maiden, may lawfully solemnize marriage together, . . . with once asking of the bannes." The seal of R. H. (probably Richard Hathaway) is appended to the bond. Notwithstanding this evidence of the perfect and formal legality of the whole proceeding, there are biographers, with "imaginations foul as Vulcan's stithy," who fancy that this faithful couple, who had thus placed themselves under the protection of responsible friends, had nevertheless assumed a license before marriage; not because there is any evidence existing for any such disgusting suspicion, but because the Stratford registers indicate that their townsfolk were frequently guilty of precipitation. Shakspere was as much superior to his townsfolk in this as in other respects. On 26th May 1583, their first child, Susanna, was baptised, and registered as begotten in wedlock. The father was about nineteen years of age, the mother about twenty-six. From the perfect regularity of the whole proceedings, it is probable that they had available means of support, and these appear to have lasted until 1585, February 2d, when their son and daughter, Hamnet and Judith, were baptised. A man with a wife and three children had given hostages to fortune; and a due sense of his responsi-

* It was discovered, in 1836, by Sir Thomas Philips, in the Worcester Registry.

bility induced Shakspere to extend his dealings with the world, and try the result of a visit to London. He was, we are told, "inclined naturally to poetry and acting, and had begun early to make essays at dramatic poetry;" and in these facts we find sufficient motive for his visit to the metropolis, and the nature of the employment in which he was there engaged. That he had a house in Southwark; that his brother Edmund lived with him; and that his wife was his frequent companion in London, are all exceedingly probable suppositions, and worthier of belief than the generally accredited gossip-tales, idle in themselves, and uncertain in their origin, which never had the slightest documentary evidence in their favour.

To return.

The second play written by Shakspere, as I take it, also mentioned by Meres in the same year, 1598, was *The Comedy of Errors*, probably composed in 1586, which bears certain marks of its proximity in date from its mode of treatment. One mark is the rhymed doggerel in which in both plays he makes his clowns occasionally discourse. Thus, in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Speed rattles away in this fashion:

> "Sir, I could perceive nothing at all from her better;
> No, not so much as a ducat for delivering your letter;
> And being so hard to me that brought to her your mind,
> I fear she'll prove as hard to you in telling you her mind.
> Give her no tokens but stones, for she's as hard as steel."

And in *The Comedy of Errors*, Dromio of Ephesus thus delivers himself in the same style and manner:

> "Say what you will, sir; but I know what I know,
> That you beat me at the mart, I have your hand to show.

If my skin were parchment, and the blows you gave were ink,
Your own hand-writing would tell you for certain what I think."

And he goes on at some length with this sort of skimble-scamble stuff. The Speeds, Launces, and Dromios of these comedies are all cast in the same mould, and formed in the same mechanical type—that of the Old Vice in the Mysteries and Moralities, with which in this country our national drama commenced. There is, in fact, individuation, but not individuality.

In the plot of this play we have further evidence of Shakspere's primary classical predilections, it having originated in the *Menæchmi* of Plautus. In the treatment of his subject, Shakspere shows more skill than he had in his previous play. The situations are ingeniously contrived, and the conclusion judiciously produced. The work, however, though called a comedy, is not so properly such, perhaps, as a farce; but, curiously enough, it has a tragic commencement. The first scene is grave and poetic both in style and subject. Already we may note a great improvement in Shakspere's versification. It has become bold and free, nervous and masculine. In place, too, of the capricious sentimentalities of the first play, we begin to have maxims of wisdom; such as:

"Why, headstrong liberty is lashed with woe.
There's nothing situate under heaven's eye,
But hath his bound, in earth, in sea, in sky."

"Patience unmoved, no marvel though she pause;
They can be meek, that have no other cause.
A wretched soul, bruised with adversity,
We bid be quiet, when we hear it cry;
But were we burthened with like weight of pain,
As much, or more, we should ourselves complain."

Much of the dialogue, both serious and comic, is in rhyme; and some of it in elegiac, or alternate, rhymes. The same marks pertain to the play next in order, *Love's Labour's lost*, probably written in 1588. The style of both plays is classical, and shows the author to be yet in the imitative stage of his art. Nevertheless in the latter there is a change. The spirit of the author's age has entered into his own, and begun making him its apostle. Here we meet with the same declaration against celibacy as in the Sonnets; and the claims of that revived learning which was to help on the work of reformation, both in religion and manners, are recognised. The poet, having possessed himself of the vehicle of utterance, and mastered its laws and practice, now begins to use it in the service of that mission to which by Providence he had been appointed.

The new era in England had now indeed dawned; for the morning-star had arisen in the mind of her greatest genius—the mind that was at once to be the mirror of creation, whether human or natural.

This comedy and the tragedy of *Hamlet* had the same birth-year; but the former was printed earlier. The same elements belong to both; each, in its own way, is philosophical and critical, and dependent rather on the dialogue than the story. They are both scholastic dramas, replete with the learning of the time, and bear marks of their author having been a diligent student. In *Love's Labour's lost* there is an ostentatious display of classical lore. The spirit of the whole is a desire to represent the manners of the

Elizabethan epoch in the costume of the Middle Ages. What has been called "the whimsical determination on which the drama is founded" is in perfect harmony with that costume, and with the history of "the Courts of Love," which had so much interest for the kings and knights of chivalry. But the real subject is the triumph of Protestant principle over vows of celibacy and other similar absurdities in the institutions that the Reformation had superseded; and in connection with this, the illustration of the characteristics of the new age then beginning. The king of Navarre vows himself to seclusion and study for three years, and swears to certain "strict observances:" such as, "not to see a woman in that term;" "one day in a week to touch no food, and but one meal on every day beside;" "to sleep but three hours in the night, and not be seen to wink of all the day:" —but state necessity compels an interview with the daughter of the French king and her suite; and all these vows dissolve before the presence of beauty. Biron, the wit of the piece, declares the necessitating motive-power of this wholesome perjury:

> "The sea will ebb and flow, heaven show his face;
> Young blood doth yet obey an old decree:
> We cannot cross the cause why we were born;
> Therefore of all hands must we be forsworn."

The same moral is enforced in a still sterner manner in *Measure for Measure*, written full fourteen years later. The reader who desires to mark the steps of the author's improvement, and to identify the same mind in both works, will do well to compare the two

plays. In the latter, the poet has put off the student, and taken on the statesman; the State is substituted for the Academe, as the arena for the display of the dramatic fable. We shall best find, however, the characteristics of the Elizabethan period in the academical aspects; simply because they were the result of an educational process, partly carried on through the medium of the pulpit, and partly through that of the press. The schoolmaster and the curate are accordingly intruded into the play, and exhibited in contrast with an uninstructed constable, significantly named Dull, of whom Sir Nathaniel, the priest, thus speaks:

> "He hath never fed of the dainties that are bred in a book;
> He hath not eat paper, as it were; he hath not drunk ink:
> His intellect is not replenished; he is only an animal not to think,
> Only sensible in the duller parts."

And the concurrence of such opposite characters on the same plane doubtless serves intentionally to indicate the stage of transition into which the era was then passing. Connected with this point is the peculiar diction of the play; its euphuism, and its word-catching, in which educated and uneducated are alike implicated. Here, too, the poet enacts the critic, and tells us, in the person of his pedant Holofernes, that all this implies "a gift,"—in other words, "a foolish extravagant spirit, full of forms, figures, shapes, objects, ideas, apprehensions, motions, revolutions: these are begot in the ventricle of memory, nourished in the womb of *pia mater*, and delivered upon the mellowing of occasion." He adds, that "the gift is good in

whom it is acute;" and that he is "thankful for it." It was, indeed, however "foolish and extravagant" in appearance, a valuable inheritance, derived, as another poet reminds us, from "a hundred years of controversy, involving every great political, and every dear domestic, interest." The same writer judiciously refers us to the style of the sermons of the time, and the eagerness of the Protestants to distinguish themselves by long and frequent preaching, as proving that, "from the reign of Henry VIII. to the abdication of James II., no country ever received such a national education as England." But the general state of development is imperfect, and exhibits, therefore, many ridiculous qualities, of which the comic poet rightly avails himself. There are also many pretenders to "the gift" who are fair butts; and likewise the vulgar ignorant, who "imitate" their betters "abominably," and misapply the phrases in fashionable use. The coxcomb Spaniard Armado, and his precocious page Moth, with the clown Costard, are representatives of these. All equally "draw out the thread of their verbosity finer than the staple of their argument." And even so does the play itself, which has scarcely any argument of action, but abundance of dialogue teeming with verbal affectations, and devoted mainly to their exposure. There is no incident, no situation, no interest of any kind;—the whole play is, literally and exclusively, "a play on words."

While looking upon all this from the absurd side, the dramatist is, nevertheless, careful to suggest to the thoughtful student of his work, by means of some

beautiful poetry, aphoristic sentences, and other finely artistic devices, that above these negative instances, when exhausted, there will be found to preside an affirmative and prior principle, which is indeed the spirit of the age, whereby the "Providence which shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will," is conducting and guiding the world in its progresses to "a consummation devoutly to be wished." A philosophical, nay, a pious, design and purpose lies at the bottom of all the whimsicalities that misrepresent what they should embody;—in so doing, however, not especially singular; since the most serious and grave solemnities must also needs fall infinitely short of the verities they symbolise.

Nor has Shakspere left this very curious Aristophanic drama without its Chorus. It is the witty Biron who fills that office; whose shafts, however, are not directed against the euphuism of the time, but against the attempted asceticism which the progress and catastrophe of the play are destined to explode. Early he reminds the king that study is little benefited by the practices proposed. "Study," says he,

> "Study me how to please the eye indeed,
> By fixing it upon a fairer eye;
> Who dazzling so, that eye shall be his heed,
> And give him light that it was blinded by.
> Study is like the heaven's glorious sun,
> That will not be deep-searched with saucy looks:
> Small have continual plodders ever won,
> Save base authority from others' books."

How easy was it to apply all this to religion and government! There had been a break-up to all such

"base authority;" and an authority not base had to be constituted in its stead. But obsolete canons were useless; original perception alone could find the remedy. They having failed, Biron accordingly returns to the charge:

> "When would you, my lord, or you, or you,
> Have found the ground of study's excellence,
> Without the beauty of a woman's face? . . .
> For where is any author in the world
> Teaches such learning as a woman's eye? . . .
> —Love, first learned in a lady's eyes,
> Lives not alone immured in the brain,
> But with the motion of all elements
> Courses as swift as thought in every power,
> And gives to every power a double power,
> Above their functions and their offices.
> ⁂ ⁂ ⁂ ⁂ ⁂ ⁂
> From women's eyes this doctrine I derive:
> They sparkle still the right Promethean fire;
> They are the books, the arts, the Academes,
> That show, contain, and nourish all the world.
> ⁂ ⁂ ⁂ ⁂ ⁂ ⁂
> Let us once lose our oaths, to find ourselves,
> Or else we lose ourselves to keep our oaths.
> It is *religion* to be thus forsworn;
> For charity itself fulfils the law;
> And who can sever love from charity?"

Here, indeed, is a justification for Luther and his broken vows. The very genius of the Reformation inspires this drama. The wife is enthroned instead of the vestal; and the married man cares no longer for the song of the cuckoo, or the menace of horns. Biron, who utters these sayings, is himself a convertite. Like an incipient Benedick, he had allowed himself, indulging a satirical disposition, to rail at women; but love has now brought him to his right wits.

By the plentiful use of negative instances, the poet was enabled to place in a ridiculous light both the new learning and the old asceticism; and thus preserved a dramatic impartiality which would recommend his play to both parties. He dreaded to demonstrate a bias. Yet we shall do well to note in Biron's eulogies of woman a seriousness and earnestness which contrasts with the sport that ever attends the phrase-mongering portion of the drama. He solemnly adjures his hearers,

> "For Wisdom's sake, a word that all men love,
> Or for Love's sake, a word that loves all men,
> Or for Men's sake, the authors of these women,
> Or Women's sake, by whom we men are men,"

to restore that reverence for Beauty, the vision of which, in woman's form, "adds a precious seeing to the eye." All this is terribly in earnest. How different from the child-wit of Moth, even in its most ponderous and direct shape!—for example, "They have been at a great feast of languages, and stolen the scraps;" in which excerpt even the serious fact is communicated through a comic vehicle.

The composition of this play, if duly considered, may serve to dissipate many errors regarding the qualities of mind needful to a man's becoming a dramatist. First and foremost, we find in this comedy a reliance on the poetic capacity. There is no extraneous action, no borrowed story, but the very materials of it are made out of the poet's own mind; he trusts, not to his fable, but to his own wit and fancy. The logic of wit and the conceits of poetry are its

twin-factors. The orthographer, the grammarian, the philosopher, and the classical student then come in, to give form to the matter; all disguised in the mask of a word-trickster, who revels in his privilege, yet affects to abuse you for permitting him to exercise it. While, therefore, the play is purely a creation out of nothing, the dialogue presents itself as a scholastic laboratory, where phrases are passed off for thoughts, and verbal exaggeration must be accepted for humour. It is not on the business of the stage, the rapidity or complication of action, or the interest of the story, that the poet depends,—these would have all been alien to the spirit, design, and purpose of the work; but on the activity of the thought, the intellectual combination of ideas, and the logical juxtaposition of verbal signs. He had faith that out of these an effective play could be generated; and it was so. Foreign materials, also, are doubtless rendered available; the observations of character implied in the different *dramatis personæ*. These are, as confessed by Coleridge, such as a country-town and a schoolboy's experience might supply,—the Curate, the Schoolmaster, and the Armado,—which latter, even in the transcendental critic's time, was, he tells us, "not extinct in the cheaper inns of North Wales." In the Boyet and Biron, however, we recognise *rôles* requiring a courtier's acquaintance with things courtly, and a certain amount of worldly knowledge; while, in Costard, Moth, and Dull, we perceive a dramatic art scarcely excelled in the poet's more mature productions. So early had he perceived that law of dramatic

composition, by which the highest was to be brought into sympathy with the lowest intellects, through intermediation of such characters as Roderigo in *Othello*, and the Fool in *Lear*. If our calculation be correct, *Love's Labour's lost* was the product of Shakspere's twenty-fourth year;—but it is not until nine years afterwards (Christmas 1597), that we find a register of its having been acted. The play is an organism; and as such is remarkably elaborate; as any one will discover who examines the manner in which the fourth and fifth acts are constructed, and the artifices with which the various discoveries are prepared for: but the elaboration is carried to excess; four lovers and four ladies encumber the scene, and make a development needful, that prolongs the treatment beyond the limits of patient attention. In the course of his dramatic practice, Shakspere was taught a wiser economy, and also learned the advantage of adding to his own idealities an historic or romantic action, as a convenient body for their stage-manifestation. But it was the Soul that gave Form to the body, not the body that prescribed Laws to the Soul.

It has been thought that Holofernes was a caricature of either Curate Hunt, or Thomas Jenkins, who presided over* the free grammar-school at Stratford-

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* Prior to the foundation of the school, that is in 1482, Thomas Jolyffe left lands to the Guild of the Holy Cross of Stratford-upon-Avon, provided they "should find a priest fit and able in knowledge to teach grammar freely to all scholars coming to the school in the said town to him, taking nothing of the scholars for their teaching." That

upon-Avon, where it is *supposed* that Shakspere was educated. The conditions of admission to the school were, that the candidate should be seven years of age and able to read. The son of John Shakspere, chief alderman of the town, was of course eligible for admission on these terms; and it is surmised that in 1571,—the year in which Robert Ascham's *Schoolmaster* was published,—the name of William Shakspere was enrolled as a pupil by the then master, Thomas Hunt, Curate of Luddington. Here he might learn, it is said, Latin, Greek, French, and Italian, and become acquainted with Æsop, Terence, Virgil, Cicero, Sallust, Cæsar, Horace, and Ovid; and also in Greek with Lucian, Aristophanes, Homer, and Xenophon. If Shakspere really received his education at this school, thus much of classical knowledge would naturally fall to his lot, and, judging from his plays, it would have been eagerly cultivated. At any rate he was well grounded in Latin: as is evident from the character of his English style, which is highly Latinised. In many cases Shakspere preferred the strict Roman signification of words to the meaning in current use—in fact, this is one of the marks of his composition. Only a mind thoroughly imbued with the Latin language would have written, in *Hamlet*, for instance, "The extravagant and erring spirit hies to his confine."

Guild was dissolved at the Reformation, and its lands fell to the king. Ultimately the town was incorporated, and the charter ordained "that the *free* grammar-school for the instruction and education of boys and youths there, should be thereafter kept up and maintained as theretofore it used to be."

In *Love's Labour's lost* the attempts at character are more successful than in the previous plays; and now, as already intimated, the poet produces a drama in which character is all-in-all; I mean the tragedy of *Hamlet*, the first sketch of which was, as I have said, apparently written in the same year with the last-named comedy. Another poet had already written a tragedy on the same theme. The influence of this writer on Shakspere's mind, and in particular on the conduct of this drama, is very perceptible. Thomas Kyd, in his *Spanish Tragedy*, the only work of his which has survived, shows a preference for the introduction of ghosts, for the expedient of acting a play within a play, on which indeed his catastrophe depends, and for making the leading character dominate the entire action, and colour even the pettiest details of the drama. Hieronimo, his hero, imparts his personal feeling to every scene, and interprets by it every incident. This *Spanish Tragedy* was a great favourite, and the players were accustomed from time to time to get new scenes added to it; some of which are supposed to have been composed by Ben Jonson. These additional scenes are all written on the same principle, so well was the spirit of the play understood. They bring Hieronimo into contact with fresh characters; but all illustrate the same individual feeling, and show the hero making them the mirrors in which he may contemplate his own particular state of mind. The same sort of repetition is observable in *Hamlet;* whence in acting some soliloquies are omitted, their substance having been included in those that are

retained. Among those omitted is the great soliloquy pronounced by Hamlet, after meeting with Fortinbras. Hamlet's "pale cast of thought" is made to shed a like meditative hue on every thing. Kyd's Hieronimo, like Hamlet, is apparently mad; and like Lear, another instance of the same principle, transfers his own mental conditions to other objects, and confounds their attributes with his own associations. I am inclined to believe that many of these repetitions are due to Shakspere having copied some parts of Kyd's play of *Hamlet;* and, as was done with *The Spanish Tragedy*, then added, in the same spirit, incidents of his own. The ghost scenes and the play scene are doubtless derived from Kyd's tragedy. As to the real state of Hamlet's mind, it may be gathered from his readiness to assume madness. This shows a sympathy with the infirmity, such as "great wits" are proverbially supposed to possess. The *Hystorie of Hamblet*, from which the plot of the tragedy is taken, has a reference to this tendency, and quotes in point the instances of David and Brutus. Hence we find Hamlet contemplating suicide *before* he had seen the ghost of his father:

> "O, that this too-too solid flesh would melt,
> Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
> Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
> His canon 'gainst self-slaughter!"

His mother's conduct, the aspect of the world, his father's death,—all made Hamlet impatient of life, which would not take the shape of his desires, but persisted in having one of its own. Youths of genius

have frequently shown this yearning for death; Goethe confesses to it in his boyhood, while as yet he was uncertain whether he should win the fame of which he was ambitious. Of this state of mind Hamlet's melancholy is the index. The *Hystorie* pretends to give its origin, and in so doing suggests the supernatural element, upon which Kyd and Shakspere appear to have improved, comprehending it in the visitations of his father's spirit. "In those dayes," says the chronicler or novelist, "the north parts of the worlde, living as then under Sathan's laws, were full of inchanters, so that there was not any yong gentleman whatsoever that knew not something therein sufficient to serve his turne, if need required: as yet in those days in Gothland and Biarmy, there are many that knew not what the Christian religion permitteth, as by reading the histories of Norway and Gothland you maie easilie perceive:—and so Hamblet, while his father lived, had been instructed in that devilish art, whereby the wicked spirite abuseth mankind, and advertiseth him (as he can) of things past. It toucheth not the matter herein to discover the parts of devination in man, and whether this prince, *by reason of his overgreat melancholy*, had received those impressions, devining that, which never any but himselfe had before declared, like the philosophers, who, discoursing of divers deep points of philosophie, attribute the force of those devinations to such as are saturnists by complection, who oftentimes speake of things which, their fury ceasing, they then alreadye can hardly understand who are the pronouncers; and for that cause

Plato saith, many deviners and many poets, after the force and vigour of their fier beginneth to lessen, do hardly understand what they have written, although intreating of such things, while the spirite of devination continueth upon them, they doe in such sorte discourse thereof that the authors and inventers of the arts themselves by them alledged, commend their discourses and subtill disputations."

He who would study the tragedy of *Hamlet* thoroughly should read therewith this novel or chronicle of Belleforest's, which may be found in his *Histoires Tragiques*, published in 1564. The differences and agreements between them would alike illustrate the wonderful transfigurations that such legends undergo while passing through the poetic mind which gives to them that ultimate shape of beauty, by virtue of which they become immortal. The imaginative tendency of Hamlet's mind, so quaintly predicated by the novelist, is finely illustrated by Shakspere in language and incidents far beyond the capacity of the author from whom he borrowed the hint. How thoroughly has Shakspere *modernised* his suggestion, so that any further refinement is scarcely possible, either of the character or the circumstances in which he is placed! Keeping to the basis, and in a great measure to the outline of the *Hystorie*, he yet creates it anew after a far higher type, and subtilly informs it with a higher spirit, by which it becomes glorified; just in the same manner as some mean and common object on a wide river, seen in the bright sunlight on a summer's day, shines out in golden hues and with aerial

tints, which really belong not to it, but to the luminous atmosphere in which it is exhibited. Genius is the sun of intelligence, and thus illuminates whatever happens to fall within the sphere of its spiritual radiance.

Shakspere had now learned, whether from Kyd or his own intuition, how to subordinate in a drama all characters to one, and how to spread the one feeling over the whole development. Accordingly we find in the very structure of *Hamlet* a pervading harmony, which, in the midst of great variety, produces a remarkable unity, and renders it one of the best-constructed dramas, one of the noblest poems in the world.

Shakspere's age, at the time when I suppose *Hamlet* to have been written, was, as I have already stated, four-and-twenty. He was, indeed, a young man, but he had married, and was a father; and his mind had rapidly risen to the level of his position and its serious responsibilities. It had now become reflective, even to a fault; henceforth all that it beheld would be seen in the light of the imagination, and the exclusively prosaic find no longer a place in his works.

Shakspere had now mastered the art of organism in dramatic production. In *Love's Labour's lost* and *Hamlet* we have a more and less elaborate specimen of such art. But the poet yet required practice to procure for him perfect facility in it. Such facility begins to appear in his next play, *All's well that ends well*, probably written in 1590. The tone of the play

is derived from its leading character, Helena, who, to obtain the husband of her choice, has strength of mind to dare any amount of difficulty and danger, and succeeds. All the other characters are subordinate to her. But a comic element is introduced, which has also a force of its own, independent and distinct from the general plot, though cleverly connected with it. The poet had shown in *Hamlet* a wish to lighten his pieces by this admixture, and a capacity for it by his invention of such characters as the two Gravediggers and the vain young Osric. He no longer imitates such parts from the Old Vice converted into a clown or humorous servingman; but creates individual portraits from his own mind, and embodies them in materials accumulated from his own experience. There is the like process of organisation in such individual characters, as in the entire organism, or drama as a whole. Coleridge, indeed, applies the same idea to the very diction of Shakspere. As a vital attribute of his style, we find him in this very play connecting words by means of unmarked influences of association pertaining to some preceding metaphor; and "this it is," his critic adds, "which makes his style so peculiarly vital and organic." We find also a philosophical inspiration in the use of words, which begets a singular sort of admiration for Shakspere, as the anticipator of recondite truths since anew discovered by the most recent transcendental speculators. Many of these wonderful coincidences were pointed out by Coleridge; and one occurs in this play, eminently noteworthy on many accounts.

Lafeu is made to remark, that, "they say, miracles are past; and we have our philosophical persons, to make modern and familiar, things supernatural and *causeless*." On this passage Coleridge shrewdly judges that "Shakspere, inspired, as it might seem, with all knowledge, here uses the word *causeless* in its strict philosophical sense; cause being truly predicable only of *phenomena*, that is, things natural, and not of *noumena*, or things supernatural." Proofs these, all of them, that the organic had now completely superseded the mechanical in the poet's method of working; and that from merely individuating, as the simple resultant of position, he had passed into the higher forms of life, in which the Individual manifests itself as a voluntary agent, by the force of will initiating particular forms of development, some of them even ludicrously capricious.

Helena, the heroine of this drama, is an example of such force of will, and of its power to modify circumstances, and form character. Her position at the opening of the play is similar to Hamlet's. She is in grief, apparently for her father; but really in anxiety for him whom she would have for a lover. The Countess, under whose guardianship she is, substitutes in some respects Polonius, and gives to her son Bertram, about to set out on his travels, similar counsel to that which Ophelia's father impresses on his son Laertes under similar circumstances. So gradual is the poetic development as carried through from play to play, when once the right order of their succession is discovered. In other respects Helena is the

reverse of Hamlet; she acts where he thinks. And it is in this contrast that the poet found relief, in composing the two pieces in immediate succession. We trace in this the motive, as well as the method, of his working, in regard to the fine drama now under consideration.

Shakspere permits to Helena what he had denied to Ophelia; that is, to love one "out of her sphere." Wildly she exclaims:

> "I am undone: there is no living, none,
> If Bertram be away. It were all one,
> That I should love a bright particular star,
> And think to wed it, he is so above me:
> In his bright radiance and collateral light
> Must I be comforted, not in his sphere.
> Th' ambition in my love thus plagues itself:
> The hind that would be mated by the lion
> Must die for love."

Nevertheless, she dares what Ophelia could not. In all respects she is the opposite of Ophelia; self-willed and self-reliant. Hence, to the higher-class critic, she is "the loveliest" of Shakspere's heroines; and to the low-minded commentator, "her pursuit of a man who hated her is an inherent indelicacy in her conduct, and not all the estimable qualities she possesses can wash her pure of that stain." Poor, conventional, unpoetic, and unphilosophical criticaster! We pity his dullness, and pass on.

In the energy of will lies all personality; and the charm of Helena is her determination of character, that rises above conventional morality, or what we familiarly call manners, into the pure and poetic re-

gion of transcendental morals, in which the sublime virtues only can respire. Helena, accordingly, is not nice in her topics, and discourses with the cowardly Parolles on virginity in terms somewhat gross; at least, she endures grossness in him without rebuke. What then? She is one of her poet's advocates for Matrimony *versus* Celibacy, and is sanctified by her cause. "Virginity murders itself, and should be buried in highways, out of all sanctified limits, as a desperate offendress against nature." The very language and doctrine of the Sonnets. Helena would lose hers to Bertram willingly; but must await opportunity. Thus boldly the poet puts her case, trusting to the essential purity of the theme as a justification for the apparent grossness. The nude in Art may offend the narrow or low-minded, but the free spirit loves nature as God made it.

The same strain of sentiment is continued afterwards in a dialogue between the Countess and the Clown; for Shakspere had now learned the art of colouring the entire play with a predominant feeling, and making each of his characters in succession to contribute to it. Accordingly, "If," says the Clown, "men could be contented to be what they are, there were no fear in marriage; for young Charbon the *puritan*, and old Poysam the *papist*, howsome'er their hearts are severed in religion, their heads are both one; they may joll horns together, like any deer i' the herd." No doubt such affirmations were, and are, and will be, offensive enough to the Charbons and Poysams of all ages; still "the liberal man will

devise liberal things, and by liberal things shall he stand." Even as the Clown sings:

> "For I the ballad will repeat,
> Which men full true shall find:
> Your marriage comes by destiny,
> Your cuckoo sings by kind."

And, so far from resenting the ardour of Helena's passion, the Countess treats it with becoming reverence, as a holy product of natural desire, and helps it on with the best aid she can render. And thus all proceeds in the play as in a Scripture narrative; and more than once, indeed, Scripture is quoted in it. Thus, in answer to the king's objection, that Helen knows no art, and therefore cannot cure him, she replies:

> "He that of greatest works is finisher,
> Oft does them by the weakest minister;
> So holy writ in babes hath judgment shown,
> When judges have been babes."

When the king still declines, but tenders his thanks for her proffered service, she answers:

> "Inspired merit so by breath is barred.
> It is not so with Him that all things knows,
> As 'tis with us that square our guess by shows;
> But most it is presumption in us, when
> The help of Heaven we count the act of men.
> Dear sir, to my endeavours give consent;
> Of Heaven, not me, make an experiment.
> I am not an impostor, that proclaim
> Myself against the level of my aim;
> But know I think, and think I know most sure,
> My art is not past power, nor you past cure."

We might think that we heard Joan of Arc speaking; or rather a Hebrew prophetess. The Bible has contributed a great deal to the lines of Helena's por-

trait. Much of his art Shakspere learned from its pages.

The character of Parolles is one of the pure creations of Shakspere, with which he was wont to strengthen his comic underplots, by supplying them with a central figure. Liar, fool, and coward, are the attributes of this vain and braggart fop, who would live on a false reputation. He is designed as a skreen for Bertram, so that the faults of the young noble may be set down for the effects of this base companionship; and that the discovery of the fellow's pusillanimity may be made the turning-point of the Count's own conversion. But this is only one of the points in the admirable conduct of this play. The structure is so facile, so grows out of the mind of the persons that compose it, that the whole is, as it were, the expression of a gracious intelligence,—in a word, simply a realised ideal.

Shakspere had completely formed his style; and this play is beautifully written, with a vigour thoroughly masculine. He had now shown himself a man of sufficient classical learning; of considerable information as regards a knowledge of the world; acquainted too with popular literature; and well read in the romances of the time; besides being a philosopher, a reformer, and a poet. But there was one thing which he had not yet exhibited—the force and influence and results of passion, as all these might be represented in a master drama. And this task he now set himself to perform.

The tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* is the greatest

love-play in the world. A date in it, in reference to an earthquake in 1580, fixes the period of its composition in 1591. Exactly twenty-nine years previously the subject formed the argument of a long English poem, by one Arthur Brooke; but a drama on the same theme had been exhibited even before that date. In 1567 the story was also told in William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure.* But Brooke's poem it was, beyond doubt, that formed the basis of our poet's tragedy, though he is also indebted to Painter's work. All alike were indebted to Bandello, who wrote the story first in Italian, but borrowed it from a narrative written by Luigi da Porto, and published in Venice six years after his death,—that is, in 1535.

One rises from the study of Brooke's elegant poem surprised at the extent of the use that Shakspere made of it. Numerous are his obligations to the work, and curious the manner in which he has wrought its suggestions into the dialogue of his tragedy, frequently copying its imagery and sentiment. It is evident that Shakspere had not, like some commentators, found the poem tedious. Absurd depreciation of a really excellent old poem! About it, too, there is an air of originality, which compels the belief that the treatment of the story is due to his own poetic genius. Some doubtful points in Shakspere's drama are cleared up in Brooke's poem. It must have struck every reader of the former, that both Romeo and Juliet's excessive lamentations for his banishment from Verona rather want motive.

Why could not Juliet have gone with him? and, by so doing, have prevented the after evils, which originate solely in their apparently needless separation. Brooke's poem supplies the *hiatus*. Juliet there supplicates her lover for his permission to be his companion in exile. But he gives her the reasons why this cannot be:

> "For, but thou change thy mynde (I do foretell the end),
> Thou shalt undo thyself for aye, and me thy trusty frende.
> For why, thy absence knowne, thy father will be wroth,
> And in his rage no narrowly he will pursue us both,
> That we shall trye in vayne to scape away by flight,
> And vainely seeke a loorking place to hyde us from his sight.
> Then we, found out and caught, quite voyde of strong defence,
> Shall cruelly be punished for thy departure hence;
> I as a ravisher, thou as a careless childe;
> I as a man who doth defile, thou as a maid defilde."

These reasons Shakspere left to the imagination of his audience, or perhaps to their memory.

But, as in his previous efforts, Shakspere also in this reserved to himself the right of introducing a comic creation to lighten and relieve the tragic weight of the original story. Mercutio is perhaps the poet's finest effort in this way. Here, indeed, is life in its highest form—Individuality. If poems and dramas live according to the degree of life in them, this one part in the tragedy is vital enough to quicken the whole. And this purpose it really serves. None think of Romeo without associating him with Mercutio, the soul of the earlier scenes. It is he that lends animation to the barren incidents of the opening. And Shakspere has poured upon him all the wealth of his genius. Much of what Romeo and

Juliet say is derived from Brooke's poem; but Mercutio is indebted altogether to Shakspere's inspiration for his fancy, his valour, and his wit; in fact, for every thing but his name. The self-determined volition of the two devoted lovers is as strongly marked in the poem as in the play. The same characteristic is exhibited in another shape in their brave and youthful friend, who supplies a motive for Romeo's attack on Tybalt. How finely all this is imagined, and how judiciously it is introduced as an element in the dramatic development, only they can feel who have had some experience in dramatic composition. To Shakspere alone belongs the credit of this.

What further merit the dramatist may claim connects itself with the elegance of his style; by means of which the grossness or crudeness in the language of the poem was refined in the drama to such an extent that our most recent poet could scarcely have exceeded the purity and delicacy of its diction. As an instance of this, compare the following passage from the poem with Juliet's soliloquy in her chamber just before taking the potion supplied to her by the friar:

"What do I know (quoth she) if that this powder shall
Sooner or later then it should, or els not woorke at all?
And then my craft descride as open as the day,
The peoples tale and laughing stocke shall I remayn for aye?
And what know I (quoth she) if serpentes odious,
And other beastes and wormes that are of nature venomous,
That wonted are to lurke in darke caves under grounde,
And commonly, as I have heard, in dead men's tombes are found,
Shall harme me, yea or nay, where I shall lye as ded?—
Or how shall I that alway have in so freshe ayre been bred,

Endure the loathsome stinke of such an heaped store
Of carkases not yet consumde, and bones that long before
Intombed were, where I my sleping place shall have,
Where all my auncesters doe rest, my kindred's common grave?
Shall not the fryer and my Romeus, when they come,
Find me (if I awake before) ystifled in my tombe?—
And whilst she in these thoughtes doth dwelle somewhat too long,
The force of her ymagining anon dyd waxe so strong,
That she surmysde she saw, out of the hollow vaulte,
(A griesly thing to looke upon) the carkas of Tybalt;
Right in the selfesame sort that she few dayes before
Had seene him in his blood embrewde, to death eke wounded sore."

These reflections, however, in the poem take place after Juliet has laid herself down in the bed; in the play, before. Drama and epic are two diverse arts, the conditions of which are different, and necessitate a different treatment.

In thus tracing the progress of Shakspere's development in his works, we are led also to study the books which he read, and are so far enabled to estimate the quality of the education which his mind received by their means in the practice of his art. Rude and crude as these tales are to us, they were read by Shakspere with reverence, as his fidelity to so much of their detail unquestionably proves. The *Diana* of Montemayor would probably be dull enough to a modern reader of George Eliot; nevertheless there are in it a shrewd philosophy and a quaint wit which doubtless Shakspere appreciated. Classical learning abounds in it, but it is mystically applied. Thus the mother of Felismena is made to condemn the judgment of Paris on the ground that, "though it was written in the apple, *that it should be given to*

the fairest, it was not to be understood of corporall beautie, but of the intellectuall beautie of the mind." The affair of the letter is told very graphically; and the cunning of the servant in taking it away with her, and then at a subsequent interview letting it fall in her sight, is skilfully portrayed. This incident fixes the certainty that Shakspere must have read the story, which I find Mr. Collier doubts. In another particular the play also follows the novel. Songs and sonnets are introduced in both as poetic embellishments of the narrative. The feeling of Felismena, while in the service of her lover as his page, is described with subtlety and psychological tact. Yes—verily it was possible for the author of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* to learn something from *The Shepherdess Felismena*.

He trusted, however, much more to himself. We find him, at this epoch, willing to furnish his plots, in part, out of his own brain, and evolve them as the development of an idea. Out of the life around him, and the life within him, he found it possible to create the king of Navarre and his court, with Biron the courtier, Holofernes the pedant, and Armado the traveller: but the exigences of the stage demanded the results of study as well as of observation, and he soon resorted to Belleforest, Painter, and Brooke for the materials that might be worked up into effective dramas. He had practised his mind in the Realisation of the Ideal; he now set himself the task of idealising the Real. How gloriously he did this, his translation of the history of Hamlet into the poetry of the tra-

gedy abundantly exemplifies. But in rendering poetry into drama he permitted himself fewer liberties. How closely he kept to the letter of Brooke's poem, respecting every where the touches of the previous artist, and only varying from him when the distinct limits of drama and poem compelled a divergence! We see here Shakspere the student, rather than Shakspere the poet. But what a student! One who was already a poet, and more, and could improve on his master. But his reverence for his teacher, however inferior to himself, contains a lesson which for superior minds is frequently as needful as the most elementary instruction to the infantile intelligence. Well it is for us to know that no intellect is so plenary as not to derive benefit from intercourse with even the meanest. The moral humility of Shakspere is equal to his intellectual grandeur. Mental wealth without pride—such is the example that he presents, both in theory and practice, to the most favoured son of genius. One's eyes fill with sweet tears as the hand records the fact, alike so honourable to Shakspere and humanity.

CHAPTER II.

"Pericles," "Titus Andronicus," not Shakspere's—Pre-Shaksperian drama—Résumé, and further criticism—Pure comedy—The dialogue of "Hamlet"—Fortinbras—Christian poet—A great poet a great philosopher—Poetic instincts—The Infinite in Love—Moderation—The elementary and impulsive, what?

It will have been observed that in the previous chapter we have made no mention of the tragedies entitled *Pericles* and *Titus Andronicus*, usually included in Shakspere's works. I do not believe that they proceeded from his pen, though perhaps acted at one of his theatres, and in a small degree corrected by him. They could not have belonged to the same period of his development; for *Pericles* indicates a mere tyro in the dramatic art, and *Titus Andronicus* a master in dramatic structure. The language and diction of the two dramas are very different in style, and neither of them is in that of the undoubted Shakspere plays. As to *Titus*, there is a tradition mentioned in 1687 by Ravenscroft, who remodelled the tragedy, that the production was indeed the work of another author, but that Shakspere added "some master touches to one or two of the principal characters." The style and subject of the drama belong, in fact, to the school that preceded Shakspere; the school of Kyd and Marlowe, and the drama was probably the production of one or other of these writers.

It is quite impossible that it could have been the work of a youthful poet; and no theory of development could account for such a work and *Othello*, for instance, being the production of the same artist in his maturity. It could not have been the production of the same mind at the same period of life which produced the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. The struggling mechanical structure of this play and of its versification alike stands in contrast with the practised stage-arrangement and resonant rhythm of the tragedy of *Titus*. Smooth as the lines are in *The Two Gentlemen*, one sees plainly enough that the writer is learning how to write verse, and only making a trial of his skill, both as to the treatment of the story and the management of the dialogue. We see in it no predilection for the tragedy of horror, but rather for the drama of elegance in which the finer feelings and the softer manners are represented. And there can be no doubt that the tone of the latter is much more characteristic of "the gentle Shakspere" than the violent and vehement action and declamation of the former. Shakspere, indeed, was a long while before he undertook to wrestle with such strong passions, incidents, and characters; and underwent, as we shall find, a peculiar process of education, before he aimed at any such result, which was first attained in his tragedy of *Richard the Third*. He had no ambition in his earlier efforts to compete with Marlowe, as is evident from his sonnets and poems, and does not seem ever to have experienced that tumult of mind in which originated *Die Räuber* of Schiller. Com-

mencing as a poet, with imitations of Italian models, he sought from the first to support his poetry with an inner meaning, and to work it out from a central idea, to which he made his story subservient; but, in its expression, he had to struggle with the form, both as to diction and structure, in which at the beginning we detect, as might have been expected, a degree of crudity, followed by more and more freedom, and at last a fullness and a ripeness testifying to the completed process. By attending to this internal evidence we can, with tolerable moral certainty, mark the order of succession in his various compositions, in harmony with the progress of his mind, and his development as a working artist,—in other words, a Dramatic Poet.

Even as early as *Hamlet* we find, indeed, the poet remonstrating against that Herodian style in which Marlowe delighted; and that even in a play which, according to reasonable supposition, was partly founded on a work of Kyd's. We may therefore perceive that Shakspere had a natural Taste as well as a natural Genius, and was more likely to follow in the vein of Spenser, Surrey, and Wyatt, than in that of the bombast playwrights. He brought from the romantic realms of Italian poesy a more delicate fancy, and introduced it into the rougher and exclusively popular kingdom of the drama. His feelings were always of a rare subtlety, and altogether alien from that gross and hard consistence which in the pre-Shaksperian drama is put forward as the conventional substitute for natural emotion.

The reference to Gower in *Pericles* would of itself, in my opinion, lead us to suspect an elder author. There was, indeed, a play under the same title, older than that which has been ascribed to Shakspere, and which is supposed to have been acted some years before the commencement of the seventeenth century. The hero was originally named Apollonius; and in 1510 Wynkyn de Worde printed a romance entitled *Kynge Appolyn of Tyre*, and which was translated from the French by Robert Copland. The French version was probably founded on the narrative in the *Gesta Romanorum*, printed late in the fifteenth century; but the original story appears to have been in Greek, and to have been thence translated into Latin, French, Spanish, Italian, and English. Latin versions of it, as early as the tenth century, exist.

The tragedy of *Pericles* was first acted early in the year 1608 with great success, at which time it is supposed that Shakspere inserted his improvements. The "ancient Gower" had already been introduced by Shakspere's predecessor. Gower had made the whole story part of his *Confessio Amantis*,—a work which has not yet received the praise to which it is entitled. As a drama, the tragedy of *Pericles* proclaims itself to be the production of a neophyte in the art, and of such neophyte at a period when the art itself was in its infancy. The style is evidently that of a young poet, wherein every object is sought to be rendered poetical by giving to it a personality. The neuter

pronoun seldom occurs, the masculine and the feminine constantly, *e.g.*

> "For death remembered should be like a *mirror*,
> *Who* tells us life's but breath; to trust it error."

Here the mirror is personified, and life and death not. Again:

> "You're a fair viol, and your sense the *strings*,
> *Who*, fingered to make man his lawful music,
> Would draw heaven down, and all the gods to hearken."

Now, do we find any such expedient for the false elevation of style in Shakspere's Sonnets, or Poems, or *The Two Gentlemen of Verona?* They are all singularly free from the artifice, reserving the practice for the grand objects of nature; such as sun, or moon, or earth, or ocean, relative to which such impersonations are quite common. The diction of *The Two Gentlemen* is remarkably plain and natural, seldom rising to metaphor, and, except in the doggerel passages, never indulging in the tricks and vain ambitions of the metre-monger. Shakspere's art, like the song of the lark, commences at a low level, and only gradually attains the highest elevations, and then only when the purpose justifies the aim. Ultimately, we find the poet, on fitting occasions, revelling in all the resources of the conscious artist; but in these earliest trials of his muse, he is modest in the use of his means, and has to wait for their augmentation, as they may disclose themselves to him in the course of practice, before he can display his riches—much thereof as yet hidden from himself.

It will be wise, therefore, in us to regard these

two doubtful plays as exhibiting the pre-Shaksperian drama, rather than that of which our poet was the creator. We may thus see the conditions of the poetic circumstances out of which Shakspere had to evolve his own personality, and the individuality of his works. The examination leads to a judgment in favour of the poet's taste. A great critic has told us that Shakespere's judgment was equal to his genius; but here we discern that his natural taste was also with him a "divine instinct"* capable of distinguishing between the false and the true. Great, then, is the error of those commentators who foolishly think that there was any period in Shakspere's manhood when he was likely to fall in with the errors of a previous school. It was, in fact, his very appearance that dispelled those errors and inaugurated the new era, the completest specimens of which were to be exhibited in his own compositions.

Thus, then, are dispelled for ever those hypotheses concerning Shakspere's earliest compositions which, we now see, from the first indicated the direction that he would ultimately take. With these, too, should vanish those absurd traditions which ascribe to the poet certain disgraceful incidents and foibles, which have no authority elsewhere. Such traits belong not to the poet of the plays and poems, but to the poet of vulgar opinion, of profane appreciation, of that outside talk which delights in scandal, and in

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* "Divine instinct" is a phrase occurring in *Richard III.;* but the poet borrowed it from Holinshed.

those sly hints that, after all, demigods are but men. Not in this spirit should we read Shakspere's biography. We should accept his works as a new evangel, and himself in some sort the hero as well as the author. We should, in fact, imitate his own example, by putting into them an Idea, and esteeming him as its appointed incarnation. In the light of such an idea, I perceive already that the task on which I have entered is sacred; and henceforth it is my purpose to pursue it in a reverential spirit. I shall bestow no attention on the idle tales of the traditionists, and treat "old-wives' fables" as of no weight, preferring "the testimony of the rocks," such as we find it in the mighty author's own gigantic productions.

Albeit Shakspere was as yet in the mechanical stage of development while composing *The Two Gentlemen*, still, even in that, he proposed to himself an idea which was to quicken the dead materials that he had selected for self-exposition. "Can these dry bones live?" he seems to have asked himself. Yes—if a spirit be breathed into them. Even so, they were quickened. Little suggestive was "the story of the Shepherdess Felismena;" but it might form the matter of a vehicle for the administration of a creative potency, and thus be made participant in its vitality. It was Shakspere's especial mission to vindicate and to justify the passion of love as the motive-spring of all healthy human action; and he therefore undertook to display its power both in the man of sentiment and the man of business. Here was a purpose which gave value to the materials, and exercised the

poet's psychological ingenuity in shaping them to his own ends. Such is the power of the great passion, that both of his heroes become its victim, in equal disregard of honour, morality, and reason; love being supreme over all, bound by no laws except of its own making, and scarcely by these. The omnipotence and irresponsibility of love are the theme of the play; and it is worked out in the most delicate manner. In fact, it is to this delicacy that the feebleness of the drama is mainly owing.

What constitutes the mechanism of the play I have already partly pointed out in regard to the manner in which the third act is made to close a cycle; but, as a comedy, there is a further mechanism, of which also Shakspere gave subsequent examples. The latest German critic calls it an æsthetic artifice, quite peculiar to him, and repeated in almost all his dramas; that is, the structure and design of each are carried out in strict parallel, the characters and events being brought into exact relation and opposition, so that not only those of a similar nature, but even those of a contrary, serve mutually to explain each other. Such are the relations into which Valentine and Proteus are brought. As to their supposed mutual explanation, much of it necessarily arises from the natural juxtaposition of the characters in the chance-medley of the story, and much of it is due to the fancy of commentators. In another fact connected with the present branch of the argument, that the comic scenes are frequently parodies of the more serious ones in the same play, we may perceive,

even in this the most mechanical of Shakspere's works, the instinct for a complete organism already manifested, and which was destined to receive afterwards such prerogative development. The evidences of this which I shall be able to give will, I trust, prove the most valuable parts of the treatise now submitted to the reader's judgment.

A great advance is indeed noticeable, even in *The Comedy of Errors*, in this and other respects, though as yet rather instinctively than consciously displayed. Of the period of its composition little doubt need exist. There is an allusion in it to the French civil wars against Henry IV., which would place it in some period between 1589 and 1593; but this allusion may have been inserted in a later copy of the play when acted in or about 1590, about four years after its composition. Indeed, a similar play existed as early as 1577. At this time a considerable period appears to have elapsed between the composition of Shakspere's dramas and their earliest mention. Perhaps the young poet had difficulties to encounter in the acceptance of his plays; and it was not until he could make good his standing that his earliest manuscripts were available. Others later written may have been first performed. The internal evidence of style, subject, and arrangement unites in natural sequence *The Comedy of Errors* and that of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

Remarkable it is in this play to see Shakspere's determination to carry out an idea. If one pair of brothers, as in Plautus, so like each other, were pos-

sible in nature, why not two? And this idea he makes to ride over all improbabilities in the story, and serve for the exaggeration of the incidents. For the reconciling of this, he has referred to a certain family character as the motive spring of individual destinies, ascribing to his comic persons a wilfulness of habit sufficient to account for any irregularity of conduct. Such a congenital tendency of mind, added to the probable accidents of life, naturally gives rise to extraordinary mistakes and surprising perplexities. It of course produces confusion in the marital relations, which the poet exhibits on both sides, picturing to us both the shrew and the amiable woman. It is not just, therefore, to represent Shakspere as drawing here upon his own matrimonial experiences, and arguing from the result that his own marriage-life was unhappy, since that result is quite as capable of supporting the contrary conclusion. It is, indeed, more likely that Anne Hathaway sat for the portrait of Luciana than for that of Adriana. It is needless to add that, in this play, the æsthetic artifice of parallelism is observed, for it lies in the very nature of the subject. Shakspere, therefore, had every temptation to exemplify the law of opposition, the polarity of physical and moral forces, and the diversity of its operation in regard to individual character; and has, indeed, availed himself of all his resources in its illustration. Farcical as is the nature of the subject, Shakspere has treated it like a poet, not abating a whit the tragic nature of the background, or suffering the dialogue, in its more important parts, to fall beneath

the style of comedy. Not seldom is it elevated above it, as in the language of the Duke, in describing the likeness of the twin-brothers:

> "One of these men is *Genius* to the other;
> And so of these: which is the *natural man*,
> And which the *spirit?*"

This language is the language of philosophy, which Shakspere, on proper occasions, could no more pretermit than he could, on any, lose that dignity of mind which was the normal habit of his poetical individuality.

The presence of this dignity among the elements involved in the present production has induced some commentators to dispute the appellation of farce bestowed on it by others. It is not expedient to defend the appellation; for the work was produced before drama was distinguished into tragedy, comedy, and farce. The *Comedy of Errors* partakes of all three, and may be accepted as an example of what drama is in a prothetic condition, previous to its division into its different kinds. I might, indeed, employ it as an illustration, so far as such a topic can be illustrated, of The Prothesis with reference to other as well as dramatic matters; but the attempt would lead me into abstract disquisition, and this I am desirous of avoiding.

It was not long before the mind of Shakspere began to make the requisite division, and essay its powers in pure comedy. In attempting this task he appears to have depended on his own experience of life and character, rather than on the statements

made in books. *Love's Labour's lost* is scarcely referable to any preceding work of any kind. One incident in it is certainly historical—the exchange of territory between France and Navarre. But the characters in the comedy, and the events in which they are engaged, are due to the poet's observation or invention. The motive for writing it evidently originated in the state of the poet's mind, and his opinion on a topic of great interest to the age of which he was destined to become the living exponent. To the subject of celibacy he had already devoted seventeen sonnets, condemning the hypocritical pretence; and now on the same subject, and with the same purpose, he had determined to compose a comedy. The drama before us had its source and root in this idea and design;—for the time, the poet's mission was comprised in these. The mission, also, was that of his age. The questions of Love and Marriage had then to be considered, and they are considered in their plenitude in Shakspere's poems and plays.

I have but little to add in this *résumé* to the elaborate details of this thoughtful comedy given in the preceding chapter. Its deficiency of action is evidently intentional, in order that its moral aim may be the more apparent. The influence of Italian poetry is felt in every line of its composition, and its profound meaning suggested. But for the purposes of art it is ostensibly concealed under a caricature expression, that the lesson may be more readily accepted by those who want it most, but whom it

would most offend. In this way, the cause not only of Love but of Learning, here associated with it, could best be defended and promoted. The dramatist's art is to insinuate truth, not directly to enforce it.

The dialogue of this play is an imitation of the wit-combats in which the learned of the time indulged, and in which Shakspere and his associates were proficient. Fuller describes these festive contests under the figure of a Spanish great galleon and an English man-of-war, intending by the former Ben Jonson and by the latter Shakspere. But his testimony, though usually quoted, is of no value;—for he was not Shakspere's contemporary, being only eight years old at the period of the poet's death. He received it, however, from trustworthy tradition; and the drama now under review gives an authentic picture of the practice under warranty of the poet's own hand. The life exhibited by him on the stage was the life actually lived in the world beyond it.

Shakspere at this period was disposed to depend more on the dialogue than on the action of the play, as is also evident in his next effort, *Hamlet*. By this time, he had thoroughly mastered the theatrical proprieties of his art, and was in a position to lecture his players on them, and also on the principles and practice of histrionic elocution. We must, however, take account of the improvements inserted in the work at a subsequent period of his life. Among these are Hamlet's contrast between Horatio's character and his own, which he delivers just before the

performance of the play of the murder of Gonzago, and the allusions to the meaning of his part while acting. The brief soliloquy at the end of the second scene of the third act is also an addition: "'Tis now the very witching time of night," &c. The King's soliloquy in the next scene is much altered. As it originally stood, it belonged, I doubt not, to Kyd; the corrections are Shakspere's additions. The fourth scene in the fourth act, where Hamlet meets with Fortinbras and his troops, and soliloquises on the fact, is also an after-thought. Our modern players omit it, because the reflections in that soliloquy are repetitions of former ones in other soliloquies. But there is an artistic reason for its introduction, since it suggests a distance of time and place, and causes the intervention of both, between Hamlet's departure and Ophelia's madness. Omit the scene, and no interval takes place; moreover, we hear of Hamlet's return on the same day that he quitted Elsinore, with all the other events of Laertes' rebellion, besides what took place on board-ship as afterwards related by Hamlet himself to Horatio. On all these accounts, the scene should be restored to its place in the representation. The soliloquy, however much it may repeat others, is likewise so explanatory of the poet's purpose that, by enlightened critics, it has been valued as the key to the whole action;—showing, to adopt the words of a German writer, that "the very design of the poet was to represent his hero as a man, whose reason had been disturbed by the shock of too difficult a task; to lead him, according to that profound simile of Horatio's,

to the dreadful summit of a steep whose height makes him giddy; as Goethe has expressed it: to delineate a mind, oppressed by the weight of a deed which he feels unable to carry out."

That the pretence of insanity as a politic expedient shows a tendency to insanity with Hamlet, I have already remarked; nevertheless, Hamlet is not positively mad, however subject to "the scholar's melancholy," attributed to him both in the drama and in Belleforest's romance. Too much deliberation impairs the power of acting, so that he delays an act of justice, which was also one of duty, until forced by accident to exertion, when he performs the deed in the worst possible manner, and one which involves his own destruction. Such deliberation is, indeed, called thinking; but meditative men, who indulge in such deliberations, are inept because too slow thinkers; whereas the man of action, as he is called, is really the more adroit and faster thinker, who translates his thought at once into deed, and thus secures at one heat its realisation and his own fortune. Shakspere makes Hamlet see this, and exclaim:

> "Sure, he that made us with such large discourse,
> Looking before and after, gave us not
> That capability and godlike reason
> To fust in us unused."

But he has not the requisite courage to carry out his own convictions, from a want of practical faith in the promptings of the soul.

I have already mentioned the contrast between Shakspere's hero and heroine, Hamlet and Helena.

There is probably a further contrast between the plays of *Love's Labour's lost* and *All's well that ends well.* Meres mentions that Shakspere wrote a drama entitled *Love's Labour's won;* and there is reason to believe that *All's well* bore originally that title. This intimates to us the ruling idea in Shakspere's mind when he commenced the piece, and will help us in detecting its Inner Life and purpose. At some after-time he appears to have remodelled the whole. In Bertram we have a continuation of Biron, but without the poetry or sentiment of the latter; alike only, in that he has to be converted to love. The style of the play is less florid, and indeed we find the poet beginning to appreciate the importance of action to drama as well as of dialogue. A decided action is therefore proposed. Helena has something to do—a purpose, on which depends the happiness of her life, to accomplish. Here, too, as we have already said more at large, we find the poet introducing comic characters of his own invention, such as Parolles, Lafeu, the Clown, and perhaps we may add the Countess of Rousillon; which characters serve to assist us in the interpretation of the dramatist's design, and by means of contrast give a pleasing variety to the stage-business. Shakspere derived little, besides the bare hint of the story, from Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*, or Boccaccio's novel. The spirit, the idea, the poetry, are all his own; the last of the best sort, and controlled within due limits by the finest dramatic judgment. The proportions of dialogue, action, and poetry, are admirably maintained, and

form a remarkably interesting structure, which will bear analysis. And all, moreover, is brought into harmony with probability, notwithstanding difficulties apparently insuperable in the original fiction. And this, after all, is the master spell of the dramatic poet, who borrows his stories, and discovers that he has to account for the anomalies of a legend crudely conceived, and never pretending to be a work of art. Particularly had he to amend the novelist's portrait of the heroine; and so makes her rather adopt, in the bold expedients she carries so successfully out, the suggestions of others than act on her own inspirations. She thus retains a delicate womanly nature while acting a part that apparently, but apparently only, offends its leading attribute. The moral struggle implied, indeed, elevates the character, so as to draw forth from it an inherent nobility, which, but for the urgent pressure upon it, would not have been developed.

The requisite reform in the character of Bertram, who likewise has ultimately to assert a nobility of nature better than that of birth, by which, in the first instance, it was overlaid and hidden, is at last effected. It is the progress of regeneration in the soul, under given conditions, that the poet traces; and to this great end every thing else is subordinated. Here we perceive that the poet of whom we are so proud is a pronounced Christian poet, and belongs to the reformed religion, which it was the spirit and purpose of the age in which he lived to initiate. That this regeneration is effected by means of the courageous love of a high-hearted woman, is also in

accordance with the same spirit, and with that particular purpose of it advocated by the poet himself in his immortal sonnets. The final object of the drama is to illustrate the compatibility between Rank and Virtue, however deeply or broadly an accidental wall of separation may previously have created a difference and a distance between them. There is nothing fatal in such disparities; for every thing is possible to love and to female energy.

It was, of course, needful to such a design that Bertram's character should be portrayed under two aspects. First, in his unreformed state; and secondly, in his converted condition. They who have ventured objections against the character in its first aspect have been less wise than the poet who created it, not having recognised the philosophical grounds according to which it was fitting that it should be represented as unamiable. Bertram is not yet worthy of Helena, but he is to become so. There is an instinct in woman which enables her to pierce through the crude hardness of an undeveloped man, and penetrate to the inner possibility as full of promise when the ripened fruit shall have attained the mellowness that renders it pleasant to the taste. Familiar examples of this turn up in our experience every day; and women have married men who have been indebted for their ultimate civility to the influence which their wives have gradually exerted upon them in the daily exercise of the domestic charities. In referring to such an influence, and showing as it were the root of it in the far nobler nature of woman, and

in the comparative innocence of her earlier training as well as in her precocious unfolding, Shakspere has justified the doctrine of his sonnets, and the mission of his era. In Bertram we are made to see the perils and temptations that beset a man in his rude unsuspecting youth; and in Helena the beneficial relationship of woman to man, on whose stubborn disposition her virtue and fidelity may at last make an impression calculated to promote and ensure his happiness here and hereafter. And thus, as the poet states, *All's well that ends well.*

As a psychological poet, this play assuredly vindicates its author's position in a remarkable manner; but, in order to be such poet, he must be a psychologist. To be a great poet, indeed, a man must be a great philosopher; nor do I know an instance in which the characters are dissociated. Light, frivolous, and sparkling verses may bring reputation and profit to the spontaneous singer, who sings, as the ploughboy whistles, for want of thought. But the Dantes, Miltons, Petrarchs, Spensers, elaborate their divine verses from thoughts and feelings "that do even lie too deep for tears," and cannot be expressed in fluent and facile commonplaces. Such was the state of Shakspere's development when he composed this play. What, then, was he as a man? Was he the vicious man upon town of vulgar tradition; or was he the thoughtful, right-feeling, and right-acting laborious artist which his works indicate? The course of inquiry on which we are engaged decides directly for the latter view.

We shall perhaps do well to bear this in mind when proceeding next to estimate the relation to their poet of *Romeo and Juliet.* In Arthur Brooke, whose steps he so closely followed, Shakspere detected a kindred mind, whose skilful unfolding of a popular love-tale might be safely adopted. The rise and course of the passion were already prescribed in the poem, and in the drama the action needed only to be condensed, and the dialogue to be enriched. In the latter, there is all the fervour of a youthful style, and some inflation also which has been felt to be indicative of an earlier period of composition than generally supposed. Indeed, there is evidence of successive draughts of the play (1597 and 1599), two of which are in print; but a far earlier draught is supposed to have existed, and there is internal evidence of the drama having been composed in 1591. The style of the work is mixed; the dramatic often passes over into the lyrical, and the phrases of older erotic poems are copied, so as to obtain a readier reception for the sentiment. In all this there is a concealed art; an art arising out of the dramatist's own poetic associations, and a natural instinct which veils the language of a sentiment that lives in its delicacy, and could only be preserved by extreme caution. In such instances we may recognise a poet, not blindly impulsive, but self-conscious throughout the process of creating; nor then trusting entirely to the immediate result, but at various intervals of time revising his work, so that its finished execution might become more and more worthy of its original conception.

In depicting Love in this play as an omnipotent passion, we must, then, believe that Shakspere was not led away by a boyish infatuation, but by a philosophical perception of its essential supremacy. Says Juliet:

> "My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
> My love as deep; the more I give to thee,
> The more I have, for both are infinite."

It is this perception of the infinite in love, which, like other great desires of the mind, would push its gratification beyond the limits of sensuous power, and thus destroy the very organism by means whereof it obtains its wishes; which, in fact, rushes on ruin and death in order to overcome all opposition to its headlong will; it is such perception that guides and regulates the poet's course in the development of his tragic story. His moral is, the need of moderation, therefore, in the gratification of such desires as partake the attribute of the Infinite. In the want of such moderation consists the error of his lovers, whose human imperfection makes them the subjects of a tragic destiny. On the other hand, the sublimity of their love fits them for heaven, and renders them worthy of immortal fame.

We have in this bipolarity of the passion a proof of the poet's universality. He gives us the two sides of the mighty question—the *plus* and *minus* opposites whereon hang, as in a balance, the issues of life and death. The wise poet, therefore, presents to us negative instances of character which permit the play of passion in imperfect natures, and therefore in a

form which admits of general sympathy. There is none for perfect heroes, who are so complete that they are beyond pity—and belief.

We have called the cycle of our poet's life, which closes with this great love-tragedy, the Elementary and Impulsive period. The elements disclosed by our analysis are of the noblest, highest, most active, and most vital in the composition of human character. We have watched their gradual growth, their combination, and the manner in which they have coalesced with other powers, and blended foreign elements in the various products of the young poet's mental activity. His sympathies have associated with him all that was refined in the learning of the time, and the men of genius and virtue by whom it was adorned. Nor have his impulses been less worthy. The spirit of progress has witnessed with his spirit, and both unite in the sublime effort of delivering man from superstition and tyranny. The moving forces of his mind have been those generous and natural feelings which attend the workings of the principle of productivity, by which the world is continued and society is renewed. The ascetic prejudices, which, if universally adopted, would not only stop the moral and mental progress of the race, but destroy the race itself, are the objects of his ridicule and condemnation. All the resources of his rich wit and humour are in every possible variety of shape directed against them. Nor does he stand alone. A brotherhood of great men is engaged in the same task;—such men as Bacon, Raleigh, Spenser, Syd-

ney, and others too numerous to mention. Of these great men the after-age recognises him as the greatest; an intellect broad and expansive, an imagination prodigal in its creativeness, a fancy boundless in its associations, a conscience versant with the highest intuitions, and a heart throbbing with the purest emotions. Of such elements, of such impulses, the works of Shakspere are the products; and we may trace in these the evidence of those. The inner life of his own soul struggles for expression in these, and gradually emerges from the mechanical into the organic, from the individuate to the individual. From the first attempts at art the incipient poet not only gains facility by sedulous practice, but by the exercise of his living forces, gradually acquiring strength, becomes at length a consummate artist; one of those of whom you cannot judge by rules, but from whose works themselves you must derive the laws whereby they are to be judged. The critic must take the laws of the epic from Homer; he must take those of the drama from Shakspere.

CHAPTER III.

Theatrical performances in Stratford — Nash — Spenser — Regularity and prudence of Shakspere's life—The two lives of men of genius — Turner—Rembrandt—Consistency of Shakspere's outer and inner life—Polonius and Laertes—Earls of Southampton, Pembroke, and Montgomery—Shakspere, according to Greene, "civil and honest" —Hamlet and Laertes—Law of duality in the drama.

The two previous chapters have traced the life of Shakspere, both internally and externally, to the year 1591. Four years previously (1587) the Queen's Players made their first appearance in Stratford. This, in fact, was Burbadge's company, which had been incorporated as the Queen's in 1583; and it has been imagined that Shakspere had already become connected with it. The merit of its members was recognised at Stratford, since it appears that they were more highly rewarded than any troupe that had previously performed in the town. Shakspere might have been at this time a sharer in the Blackfriars' theatre; but the proof alleged of this fact has not been lately held satisfactory. Three years afterwards, at any rate, Shakspere's reputation had begun to culminate; for Thomas Nash, in his *Anatomie of Absurditie*, published in that year, has some injurious remarks about "songs and sonnets," in connexion with some one or more writers, whose education

extended no further than "a little country grammar knowledge," which it is judged could only apply to Shakspere or Thomas Greene, his fellow-townsman. If applicable to Shakspere, the passage may be accepted as testimony of his having been brought up in the Stratford free school. Spenser, the following year, rendered a more favourable witness to the rising of the new poetic star, in a poem entitled *The Tears of the Muses*. Thalia is here made to lament that the poet had ceased to write comedy;—which, for the last three years, Shakspere had indeed done,—unless we must necessarily place *All's well that ends well* in that category;—and employed his pen upon the sorrows of the prince of Denmark and the lovers of Verona, and a play in which the principal interest is serious. The words of the poem are these:

> "And he—the man whom Nature's self had made
> To mock herself, and Truth to imitate,
> With kindly counter under mimic shade,
> Our pleasant Willy, ah! is dead of late,
> *With whom all joy and jolly merriment*
> *Is also deaded and in dolour drent.*"

If these verses really refer to Shakspere, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *Love's Labour's lost*, must have been very highly esteemed. The last, we know, was printed with Shakspere's name eight years afterwards; and if intended by the above verses, we may conclude that the demonstration therein made in favour of learning, and in opposition to celibacy, had for the time thoroughly done its appointed work. Spenser seems not to have appreciated the "dolour" of Hamlet and

of Romeo and Juliet; and after this period Shakspere was for some years mainly occupied with his chronicle and historical plays; so that the admirers of his comedy, among whom it appears was Spenser, had to wait, perhaps impatiently, before they met with him again on their favourite ground.

Up to this period, pursuing the light lent to us by his works, and by registered documents in official archives, the life and progress of Shakspere appears to have been remarkably regular and consistent, and not affording the slightest colour to the absurd traditions usually associated with his early years. His course, indeed, is marked by extraordinary prudence and caution. This statement, the reader will recollect, is corroborated by that of *Ratseis Ghost*, though in no very complimentary terms. According to this authority, the players of the time were, what conventional people would scarcely have suspected, "frugal and thrifty;" and of these Shakspere the most so. The suggestion conveyed by Ratsey's words is, that his general course was "to feed upon all men, to let none feed upon him, to make his hand a stranger to his pocket, his heart slow to perform his tongue's promise;" and also that "when he felt his purse well lined," he "bought him a place of lordship in the country." There are some who, accepting these words even in their best sense, would be disposed, with Delia Bacon, to think that they suited rather the character of a manager than a poet, and would have the latter painted rather as a profligate than a miser. Yet be it remembered the most thrifty habits, and

the most mercenary conduct, have sometimes been found attached to men of great genius. Voltaire, when in England, built his riches on penurious ways, and undertook commercial speculations, the profits of which were not only derived from an edition of the *Henriade*, which he published by subscription, but by dealing in lottery-tickets, gambling in the corn-trade, and lending money at usurious interests. And here, by the way, it may be observed that one of the statements made of Shakspere in his prosperity is, that he dabbled in the trade of a money-lender. But not only poetry but the sister arts, which usually associate themselves with princely habits and palatial residences, abound in instances of even sordid manners being associated with high gifts. In the works of the great painter Turner we recognise the inspiration of poetic feeling, kindred to what we find in the writings of Wordsworth, Byron, Keats, and Shelley, and which, both in the poets and the painter, gave an impulse to the public taste, the influence of which is not yet exhausted—which, perhaps, is inexhaustible. But who knows not, however passing strange he may have felt it, that there was an apparent want of correspondence between such an influence and such a man as Turner seemed to be? That such an influence should even reach such an individual is profoundly mysterious. In the outer life of this man there was little that looked attractive, much that appears repulsive. For fifty years one of the most distinguished members of the Royal Academy, always at work, always successful, accumulating

large sums of money, and utterly regardless of conventional proprieties, Turner never married, and finally died in an obscure lodging under a feigned appellation. He shrank from the lustre of an established reputation, and was himself dazzled and blinded by the light and the glory of his own name. But the eye that thus turned away from an intolerable glare, only changed the sphere of its operation, and introverted its vision; thus realising a contemplation of the Inner Life, with results as remarkable as important. Yes; this man lived two lives—an outer and an inner;—the former, mean, meagre, despicable, and sordid; the latter, rich, generous, admirable, and munificent. All the while that he was labouring on his mighty works, and funding the wealth that flowed into his coffers, Turner was cherishing in his heart of hearts a profound secret, which, when revealed, should make his name the perpetual heirloom of the future. It was all along the purpose of this apparently poor man—in whom few saw any beauty, and whose conduct not a few thought themselves entitled to censure—to bequeath his works which were priceless, and his fortune which was princely, to the Nation, and an institution for the relief of decayed artists. This, be it thoroughly observed, was his secret; and thus his Inner Life was enriched with a motive for labour of which his outward life gave no sign.

We meet with a similar instance in the character and career of Rembrandt. The son of a miller, Rembrandt nevertheless showed an early taste for drawing. His father was clearsighted enough to perceive the

indications of the boy's genius, and placed him under the tuition of artists both at Leyden and Amsterdam. He then, having homeward tendencies like Shakspere's, and local associations which were to both a passion, returned to his father's mill, and prosecuted his art for himself, by an imitation of nature. Such a retreat suited a man who perhaps felt himself unfit for the world, and who might not as yet have understood his own genius. Here, however, he painted a picture which excited attention among the townspeople, as Shakspere's juvenile dramatic and poetic attempts might have done at Stratford, before his hegira to London,—no less henceforth to be celebrated in the world's annals than that of Mahomet to Medina;—and Rembrandt was advised to take his newly-produced work to the Hague, where he disposed of it for a hundred florins. This sum appeared so large to him, that he was almost mad with joy; moreover, it excited in him a desire of gain, and a love for money, which characterised his whole afterlife. Determined, as Shakspere seems also to have been, never thenceforth to be without pecuniary means, Rembrandt now established himself in the capital of Holland, and set to work, took pupils at high fees, and after giving the final touches to them, sold their works as his own; in a word, he established a School of Painting as a means of wealth. Notwithstanding this, he shut himself out from the world, and lived within a circle of his own, marrying a simple peasant girl, and frequently associating with the lower orders, whose manners formed the usual

subjects of his compositions. He sought not honour, as he said; and though apparently he sought money and was avaricious, it is more philosophical to say that he was rather solicitous of the security that money afforded than of the money itself; in his own words, "*it was quiet of mind and liberty.*" These are the two things that the true artist requires, and which Shakspere secured; and so fearful was Rembrandt of imperilling these, that when he became a millionaire he lived like a miser, using a wooden settle instead of a chair for his meals, and contenting himself with a salt-herring and a piece of cheese for dinner. The artist gave himself no time,—in this unlike Shakspere,—for the enjoyment of his fortune. It gave him safety and calm,—that was all he cared for; his only real enjoyment was in the practice of his art. He was proud, though, of his riches, as testifying to his success, and took some extraordinary and extemporised means of increasing them; as also did another great artist—the younger Teniers. He condescended also to paint portraits, treating the patrons who sat to him, however, with undisguised contempt. And in this way he lived until he was sixty-eight.

Perceive now, that in this outwardly miserly life there was an inward purpose. The "quiet and liberty" which the artist secured by it, made him indifferent to popular influence; and something of this indifference we may trace in Shakspere. It is a great and indubitable truth that every genuine artist lives two lives in one. The artist's life in itself is an

inner life, and wholly different from the worldly life of other men. Yet, from necessity, must this worldly life be lived to some extent; for the animal man has to be nourished as well as the spiritual. The mortal has its claims as well as the immortal,—a truth which it was the mission of Shakspere's age to rehabilitate in public opinion. The quiet enthusiast, however, will not make too much of these claims, but, on the contrary, will subordinate them, as far as possible, to the wishes and desires of the soul for artistic perfection. We have had religious devotees of this sort, who have altogether sacrificed the body that they might aspire spiritually to a high state of being. Art, too, has its hermits, its pilgrims, its pauper spirits, and its self-denying worshippers, to whom all that society deems needful for respectability is a matter of supreme indifference. Absorbed in the one pursuit, they are careless what men may talk or think. They have, like the Christian, a hidden life, which is wrapt up with their whole intelligent being in an art which they regard as nothing less than divine. Such is the key for the solution of such mysteries; and in this manner may we reconcile the apparent inconsistences that meet us in the lives alike of great saints, great poets, and great artists.

We seek, however, to reconcile no such inconsistency in the life of Shakspere; for our theme requires that we should show that his inner and outer life agree. What Shakspere proposed to himself when setting forth for London, and what he practically carried out there, he has probably registered in

the sage advice given by Polonius to his son Laertes:

> "These few precepts in thy memory
> Look thou character. Give thy thoughts no tongue,
> Nor any unproportioned thought his act.
> Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar.
> The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
> Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel;
> But do not dull thy palm with entertainment
> Of each new-hatched, unfledged comrade. Beware
> Of entrance to a quarrel; but, being in,
> Bear it, that the opposer may beware of thee.
> Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice;
> Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgment.
> Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
> But not expressed in fancy,—rich, not gaudy;
> For the apparel oft proclaims the man;
> And they in France, of the best rank and station,
> Are most select and generous chief in that.
> Neither a borrower nor a lender be;
> For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
> And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.
> This above all,—to thine own self be true;
> And it must follow, as the night the day,
> Thou canst not then be false to any man."

One portion of that counsel we almost know that Shakspere practically realised. We gather this from the absence of his name in Philip Henslowe's *Diary*, —a note-book which very properly the Shakspere Society thought it right to print, containing entries concerning plays, dramatists, loans given to poor playwrights, the proceeds from performances, and the pay given to theatrical authors, extending from 1591 to 1609. Ben Jonson and Rowley, Heywood and Chettle, Field, Daborne and Massinger, Marlowe, Dekkar, Maunday, Haughton, Lodge, Greene, Nash, and others, were all pensioners on the diarist. But

Shakspere, whether or not he may have lent money professionally, seems never to have borrowed any, or to have availed himself of the opportunity and convenience of procuring money in advance. The other prudential maxims uttered by Polonius, I have no doubt he carefully observed himself with equal fidelity. He was careful as to his associates and his friends, with all of whom he was sufficiently familiar but never "vulgar;"—a virtuous reticence which is indicated clearly enough in Ratsey's sketch, but which maliciously distorted is made there to look like a vice. He was, indeed, as choice in his friends as Polonius wished his son Laertes to be. Among these was a nobleman, who has been rendered more famous by his patronage of letters than by his exploits in battle, though in war he was illustrious, and won a knighthood by his gallantry. To Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton and Baron of Tichfield, Shakspere dedicated "the first heir" of his invention, *Venus and Adonis*, and afterwards his *Lucrece*. It has been said that the Earl set Shakspere up in life with a gift of two thousand pounds. If so, we probably owe to this high-spirited nobleman the works of our unrivalled dramatist.*

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* The Earl of Southampton was born 6th Oct. 1573, and in his twelfth year was entered a student in St. John's, Cambridge, where, four years after, he took his degree in arts. Three years subsequently the University of Oxford admitted him by incorporation to the same degree. A student at Lincoln's Inn, he was only in his twentieth year when Shakspere dedicated to him his first work. He was a bold, perhaps rash man; for he connived at the escape of Sir Charles and Sir Henry Danvers, accused of manslaughter, though in so doing he was in danger

William Earl of Pembroke, and Philip Earl of Montgomery, were also friends of the great poet; and to them accordingly Heminge and Condell dedicated the first folio edition of his works. The mother of the Earl of Pembroke and sister of Sir Philip Sidney took part, in 1590, in the authorship of a play entitled *Anthony;* and in 1603 Shakspere's company, with Heminge as their official manager, performed at Wilton, near Salisbury, the seat of the Pembrokes, before the court of James, who then, it is supposed, witnessed for the first time a theatrical performance in England.*

Shakspere was no doubt of a prepossessing person, and attended to those punctilios of dress and address which recommend the aspiring to those of a superior

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of the royal displeasure. In 1597 he volunteered under Essex in the expedition against Spain; commanded a squadron, and was knighted for his valour. In 1598 he was general of the horse to Essex in Ireland, but was dismissed the service, because without the Queen's consent he married Essex's cousin. On the fall of Essex he was imprisoned during the life of Elizabeth. He then was released, and appointed governor of the Isle of Wight; but being accused of an intrigue with the royal consort, James caused him to be arrested. Being innocent, he was discharged; but retired to Spa, disgusted with his sovereign. He took part in the siege of Reis; and in 1619 was chosen a privy councillor. However, he dared the displeasure of the courtly, by taking the liberal side in politics. He died 10th Nov. 1624, of a fever caught at Bergen-op-Zoom, while commanding a small force against the Spaniards.

* The family were patrons of the drama. Among the proofs is the fact that Ben Jonson inscribed a volume of epigrams to William, and that the first folio of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays was dedicated to Philip. Massinger dedicated a play to Philip, and wrote a poem on the death of his son. The Earls jointly kept a company of players of their own; and Sir Henry Herbert, one of their house, was licenser of plays.

station. Describing him from his portrait, a modern limner in words paints him as august of aspect, with a high forehead, a brown beard, a mild countenance, a sweet mouth, a deep look. His contemporaries describe his appearance as noble; and we have Aubrey's authority for saying that "he was a handsome well-made man; very good company, and of a very ready and pleasant smooth wit." To his manners Robert Greene, who had once mistaken him, and written concerning him what afterwards he repented of, bears a pleasing testimony. "Myself," he says, "have seen his demeanour no less civil than he excellent in the quality he professes. Besides, divers of worship have reported his uprightness of dealing, which argues his honesty; and his facetious grace in writing, that approves his wit."

Shakspere has given us an example of the two lives, which even a courtier may lead, in the person of Polonius. Before their majesties of Denmark, and even with prince Hamlet, Polonius appears to be "a tedious old fool;" but in his domestic relations, with Laertes and Ophelia, he shines as a father and friendly adviser, gifted with a prudential wisdom which both duly valued. Accordingly, they reverence and love his memory; the daughter grieves for him to insanity, and the son avenges him so wildly as not even to consult his honour. His precipitancy contrasts with Hamlet's hesitation and caution. Laertes thinks as much too little as Hamlet does too much. This unreflecting conduct goes far to justify Hamlet's deliberation. Such are the subtleties which

are peculiar to Shakspere, and which so greatly enhance the interest of his works. And in this opposition of Laertes to Hamlet, Shakspere again manifests a duality, and contrives one of those double actions which occur so frequently and remarkably in his dramas. Both Hamlet and Laertes are avengers, each of a father's slaughter. Even this idea Shakspere would not trust to a single expression. But to his method in this particular we shall hereafter pay further attention, and as fully as we can explain its philosophy and purpose.

PART II.

FANTASTIC AND HISTORICAL PERIOD.

1591-1598.

CHAPTER I.

Recapitulation — Theatrical pageants — Mysteries — Miracle plays — Moralities—Masques—Ancient tragedy—Marlowe the Æschylus of English tragedy—The Blackfriars and other theatres—Legislative enactments—Royal license—"First Part of Henry VI."—Extreme protestantism—"The Taming of the Shrew"—"Second and Third Parts of Henry VI."—Duke of Gloster, afterwards Richard III.—"Richard II."—Shakspere as manager of a theatre commanded assistance—"Richard III."—Peculiarities of style—Throughout Shakspere's—His theology—"King John"—The policy of England.

Before proceeding to the second stage in the development of Shakspere's life and genius, some recapitulation of the argument already traced is desirable. First, I have endeavoured to show the fine elements which entered into the composition of his mind, and which were already in activity when he began to write. Shakspere was a practical man before he was a speculative one, and at an early age assumed the responsibilities of married life. There was neither in his character nor conduct any thing ascetic; but as a youth he had yielded to his natural impulses, and was prepared to defend his practice against the teaching of a church in its decadence, and out of which both he and his age had emerged. His mind was affected by the controversy that had long raged, and was inclined to speak with contempt of the mock chastity which subsequent times have treated with more respect. He mocked and flouted at solem-

nities which had recently lost their sacredness, and launched even indecent jests at pretensions which had been only recently exposed. With all the vigour of hilarious youth, he laughed loud and long at the grave faces and dingy robes worn by the hypocrites whom the world had now learned to despise. The scowling aspect of narrow bigotry had no terrors for his free spirit, and he vindicated the rights of man and the claims of woman both fearlessly and lovingly. For Love had established his throne in his heart both as a husband and a father; and to fulfil the responsibilities of these relations, he left his birthplace, and betook himself to the market of the world in search of fortune and honour, where ultimately he found both. His first impressions of the state of things that he witnessed there are registered in the six plays which we have examined. He studied men, but he also studied books; and the influence of the latter became stronger as he progressed in the practice of his art.

In one of these works we find an allusion to the theatrical pageants which frequently delighted his native town. Between the years 1569 and 1587 no fewer than four-and-twenty visitations are recorded of the comedians who were accustomed to aid in the representation of such amusements. The names of Greene and Burbage occur in the lists connected with these companies. Shakspere was probably early acquainted with them, and a witness of their performances. His path to the stage was therefore prepared; and on his first visit to London he seems to have

taken advantage of his opportunities. The drama had now outgrown its chrysalis state; mysteries and miracle-plays had long been out of vogue, and had been followed to the tomb of the Capulets by those allegories which were called moralities. Historical and romantic tales had forced their way to the stage; and there Shakspere found them, and resolved to add to their number. The pageants to which allusion is made in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* were exhibited on great public occasions, in honour and for the recreation of royalty, and consisted of stories in dumb-show in which historical and allegorical characters were appropriately habited, and supported on temporary movable stages in the streets. As early as the reign of Henry VI. dialogues and set speeches in verse were added. Such was the origin of masques, and the introduction of vulgar characters in dramatic compositions, as also of those plays in which there was a mixture of pantomime and dialogue—an allegorical representation in dumb-show serving as proem and foretaste of the subject of the sequent scenes.

The universities, inns of court, and public seminaries had advanced the drama still further on the road it was destined to travel. Scholars there had employed themselves in free translations of ancient tragedy, and in compositions constructed on the classic model. The tragedy of *Gorboduc* and the comedy of *Gammer Gurton's Needle* are the earliest examples of this tendency. These, for the most part, were written without any real art, almost without any plan, certainly not seldom without plot, and without

any reference to unity of action. Frequently these plays had a chorus, and the dumb-show preceded each act. The latter was often used to indicate an interval in time and a distance in space, and thus afford some degree of probability to the action. Such were the first inchoate attempts at drama in England. Prose, rhyme, and blank-verse, or a mixture of all three, were indifferently used in the dialogue. The authors of these works, though scholars, habitually disregarded the unities, and paid little attention to national colouring either in the characters or manners. The style and situations were alike exaggerated, ascending either to turgid bombast or descending to low buffoonery; for the serious and comic were generally blended in the same work. Such, in general, are the characteristics of the plays written by Greene, Hodge, Peele, Nash, Lily, and Kyd.

Contemporary with Shakspere was Marlowe, a writer who was free from many of the faults of his predecessors, and mainly aimed at sublimity. But he mistook horror for terror, and revelled in the portraiture of crime. Often, however, he is rich in pathos and inspired with the truest poetry. He may be regarded as the Æschylus of English tragedy.

Of plays so produced the mansions of the nobility and the palaces of royalty were sometimes the theatres, sometimes the courtyards of inns. The first regular theatre opened in England was the Blackfriars, erected in 1570 near the present Apothecaries' Hall. Another was subsequently built in Whitefriars, near Salisbury Court; another in Shoreditch, near where the Standard

now stands; another at Bankside, called the Globe; another called the Bull, at the upper end of St. John's Street; another in Whitecross Street, called the Fortune; another in Drury Lane, called the Cockpit or Phœnix; and several others. Some of these were summer, some winter theatres. The difference of the performances in these from those exhibited at court consisted in their having neither scenes nor machinery. But in the forty and odd years between the erection of the first playhouse and Shakspere's death considerable improvement had been made in stage-decoration.

The drama thus represented exerted an important influence on the opinions of society. Government accordingly undertook its regulation, by legislative enactments, royal proclamations, and orders of Privy Council. The actors from the first were subject to the authority of the Lord Chamberlain, and in some cases a Master of the Revels was appointed, under whose control, in 1574, Burbage and his company were placed by express terms in his license. At this period plays were acted in Lent and on Sundays, but not during the hours of prayer. Four years later, this was prohibited; but the practice nevertheless continued.

Shakspere, on his coming to London, became an actor at the Globe and Blackfriars theatres. His salary was probably, considering the parts he played, about six shillings and eightpence a week. The company performing at these houses belonged to the Lord Chamberlain, and was appropriated by King James, who granted a license, accordingly, to Laurence

Fletcher, William Shakspere, Richard Burbage, and others, constituting them his servants. Like the other servants of the household, the performers enrolled in the King's company were sworn into office, and each was allowed four yards of bastard scarlet cloth for a cloak, and a quarter of a yard of velvet for the cape, every second year.

Shakspere is said to have been in favour both with Elizabeth and James as an author, though it does not appear that he was rewarded by either. In the course of a few years, however, he rose to a high position in the theatre as a sharer not only in the capacity of an actor or author, but as a manager. A good yearly profit, it seems, accrued to him from the concern, and his interest therein was at his absolute disposal. Accordingly we find that Shakspere gradually became a rich man, and no traces of his having ever been in pecuniary distress exist. From the year 1603, he appears to have dropped his occupation as an actor, and thenceforward to have given his undivided attention to the conduct of the theatre, and the composition of his dramas.

Of these dramas, I have already considered those which were probably written between the years 1585 and 1591, during the period when his faculties were in an elementary and impulsive condition, and the poetical life that was in him was struggling from a mechanical to an organic development, and rising from the individuate to the individual. We have now to pass into what I call the Fantastical and Historical period;—of these two degrees of individuality,

dealing with the second in the first instance. We have seen Shakspere humbly and diligently following in the steps of a romantic poem, the subject of which he had taken for the argument of a passionate tragedy. We shall presently see him doing the same with history. In the same year in which he composed *Romeo and Juliet*, he was also engaged on *The First Part of Henry VI.* In undertaking this task, he availed himself of the work of a previous dramatist, whom he appears to have followed closely. Coleridge quotes the opening speech, and says that no one with an ear can ever suppose it to have been written by the author of *Love's Labour's lost*, or *Romeo and Juliet.* With such a proximity in date, the fact is an impossibility. Only a few lines in the play can have been written by him; and it is supposed that the drama itself was inserted in the folio merely because it was introductory to the second and third parts, which, though not written, had been recast by Shakspere. It was probably adopted by him merely in the way of theatrical management, and in pursuance of an intention that he had formed of placing on his stage a series of chronicle plays devoted to the life of Henry VI. And here we begin to catch a glimpse of Shakspere in his new character—that of the conductor of a playhouse,—in which his interests as an author yield to those of a manager, and he is found to be fathering, for commercial purposes, the productions of others. But this view of the case reverses altogether the usual theory respecting Shakspere's earlier employments for the stage. A little

consideration will suffice to convince a rational inquirer that a novice in stage-business and dramatic composition is not the likeliest person to be employed in the task of arranging old dramas for performance. Experience is, in fact, the one thing needful for such a service. Accordingly, we find that Shakspere had been connected with the stage for seven years before he meddled with the business of fitting the more ancient plays to the taste of a comparatively modern audience. In *Henry VI.* we may note him making his first efforts in a new walk; for it is evident that he proceeded cautiously, like a prudent beginner, and made as few alterations as possible. But though little of his genius may be apparent in the first part of the trilogy, we may estimate his taste in the choice of the piece. His judgment, no doubt, was swayed by the subject. The piece itself may be accepted as the gauge of the dramatic skill existing just previous to the advent of Marlowe and Shakspere. The anonymous author was evidently a scholar and student of history; but it is equally evident that he had paid little attention to the proper structure of a drama. He takes no note at all of the unities, but in one and the same act passes from London to Paris, Rouen, or Bourdeaux, and back again, and is regardless altogether of the lapse of time. The characters and events are introduced in the order of the chronicle sought to be dramatised; and no modification is attempted for the attainment either of a poetic or dramatic purpose. The only end in view was, indeed, an historical one —that of instructing the people, by a scenic repre-

sentation, in the chronicles of their country. Some slight accidental preference is given to a few characters, such as Talbot and La Pucelle, but not with any design to render them centrally attractive. Neither art nor artifice is employed in the development of the story, nor is any relief proposed by the invention of an underplot or of a comic character; but the writer depends entirely on his materials, and his fidelity to his authorities. Nor has Shakspere interfered at all with this simple purpose. He has only thrown in here and there a strong line or two for the occasional elevation of the style. I think I perceive his hand in the italicised lines in the following extract:

> "In thirteen battles Salisbury o'ercame;
> Henry the Fifth he first trained to the wars;
> Whilst any trump did sound, or drum struck up,
> His sword did ne'er leave striking in the field.
> *Yet livest thou, Salisbury? though thy speech doth fail,*
> *One eye thou hast to look to heaven for grace:*
> *The sun with one eye vieweth all the world.*"

There we find the poet striking in with a grand image. I suspect too that, in the touching interviews between Talbot and his son, in the fourth act, there is some enlargement by Shakspere; perhaps the two scenes were altogether introduced by him. They are eminently pathetic, though couched in rhyme.

We may also trace in the drama certain tendencies of the age. It had already begun to estimate the historical progress of the race, and to account for the present by reference to its antecedents in the

past. With inquiry also came scepticism; and we find old beliefs already fading. An extreme Protestantism is even patronised; as in the passage (in the 5th act, sc. 4) concerning the birth and conduct of La Pucelle. But the contempt for Mariolatry, thus shadowed forth in the pretensions and condemnation of poor Joan, is nevertheless exhibited as consistent with a miserable credulity in witchcraft, of which the poor victim of superstition is not only accused, but the dramatist shows her in the full practice of her damned trade, as having conference with the fiends, by whom she is prompted and betrayed. All this is presented in the clumsiest manner; and Shakspere does not appear to have meddled with the original draught at all, regarding the exhibition, such as it was, probably as a popular point, expected by the audience, and not at all to be modified without peril to the success of the performance. With our present notions of the Maid of Orleans, as interpreted for us by Southey and Schiller, these prejudices of our forefathers clash sadly. Shakspere, by disdaining to touch the matter, demonstrated that he cherished no participation in these popular delusions.

From the level, indicated by this first part of the trilogy of *Henry VI.*, our poet had to raise the drama of his country. His next venture was not of an historical character, but of a fantastic kind. *The Taming of the Shrew* was written probably in 1592, and was acted in 1593. As in other instances, the stage was already in possession of a play on the subject; and such play had, like his, an Induction, in which

Sly the Tinker is ejected from an alehouse; but Shakspere substitutes a Hostess for the Tapster of the original playwright. In other respects, there is much similarity both in dialogue and incident. At the conclusion of the first act, Sly is made again to interfere; but then Shakspere drops him entirely, whereas in the old play he is present throughout, and at the close has a scene in which he is returned to his former position, and regards all that had passed as a dream. In his Induction, Shakspere has greatly improved on his original. The plot of the drama is the same, with slight variations both in the old and new plays. For the most part, Shakspere contented himself with altering the similes and language, exerting himself rather as a poet than a dramatist. Nor was this an easy task; since the old play abounded in imagery, and was rich in poetic diction. For the underplot he went to another drama, called *The Supposes*, translated from Ariosto by George Gascoigne, and published in 1566. The same underplot is, indeed, found in the old play with variations, but Shakspere preferred the original draught. His merit entirely consists in the life and motive which he has thrown into his adaptation, so that the latter is distinguished from the productions on which it was founded as a masterpiece contrasted with previous crude essays. It is also probable that the authors of these were indebted to still elder and cruder writers; for both the story and the induction are traceable to Eastern origins, and belong to that old stock of fiction which has come down to us from prehistoric ages. Shakspere simply seized on this

world-property, and placed his own mark upon it; so strongly that, by common consent, he is now accepted as the owner of it.

And now again we find Shakspere returning to the subject of Henry VI., and occupying the years 1593 and 1594 with adapting the second and third parts of the dramatic history to his stage. He was indebted to two anonymous plays which were separately printed in 1594 and 1595, and which, according to a collected edition of them published in 1600, had been "sundry times acted by the Earl of Pembroke his servants." In a subsequent edition (1619), their correction and enlargement are attributed to Shakspere; nevertheless, they are but reprints of the copies of 1600. These plays had probably been seen by Shakspere in manuscript, or they had been contributed to his theatre, as well as to the Earl of Pembroke's, and he had corrected them as he thought fit for his own stage. No wonder then that similarities exist between these plays, and those printed as Shakspere's in the first folio edition of his works; that the persons and course of action in them are the same; and that many speeches and lines are distinguished only by trifling verbal differences. But Shakspere omitted many things which the previous poet had inserted. Of what he entirely adopted, as many as 1771 lines appear in the folio, of lines that he had altered there are 2373, and of lines written exclusively by himself there are 1899. To such an extent, then, Shakspere had collected and enlarged the original draught; and it is in fraudulent allusion to this fact that the quarto edition of 1619

pretends to contain the alterations which it does not. Besides, no play of Shakspere's was ever acted by the Earl of Pembroke's servants. His genuine works were represented either by the Lord Chamberlain's, or the Queen's, or the King's servants; and the dramas on the subject of Henry VI., as adopted by him, were never published until they appeared in the first folio edition of his collected plays.

The most noteworthy point in these plays occurs in the third part, where we find a sketch of Richard Duke of Gloster, afterwards Richard the Third. The Duke of the anonymous author is substantially the same as the wily and ambitious usurper of Shakspere. The greater poet borrowed the idea of the character from the less. But he everywhere strengthened the expression of it, by adding, for instance, such lines as the following to the original draught:

> "Why, then, I do but dream on sovereignty;
> Like one that stands upon a promontory,
> And spies a far-off shore where he would tread,
> Wishing his foot were equal with his eye;
> And chides the sea that sunders him from thence,
> Saying—he'll lade it dry to have his way;
> So do I wish the crown, being so far off;
> And so I chide the means that keep me from it;
> And so I say—I'll cut the causes off,
> Flattering me with impossibilities.
> My eye's too quick, my heart o'erweens too much,
> Unless my hand and strength could equal them.
> Well, say there is no kingdom then for Richard:
> What other pleasure can the world afford?"

Such lines stand out from the ordinary level of the dialogue; yet, to do the anonymous poet justice, there are some very vigorous verses of his own: in all

cases, however, Shakspere tops him by additions still more excellent.

And now Shakspere determined to elaborate the character of the demoniac Richard the Third for himself, as the hero of an entire tragedy. But in the same year (1595) he was also employed in the composition of another tragedy, that of *Richard the Second.* What a contrast between the two subjects! The same kind of thing, if we remember, has occurred before. No sooner had Shakspere produced his character of Hamlet than he turned to the creation of that of Helena; the latter as active as the former was thoughtful. Probably he worked on the two tragedies together, delighting himself with the contrast even in the very progress of his work. In this, however, it is evident that he had assistance; for two hands at least are recognisable in the style of the *Richard the Second.* Coleridge expresses a great admiration for this drama, particularly as a closet-play; and adds, "I feel no hesitation in placing it as the first and most admirable of Shakspere's purely historical plays." In such plays, the history forms the plot, and in *Richard the Second* this is precisely the case; for, to quote again from Coleridge, it is "the most purely historical of Shakspere's dramas. There are not in it, as in the others, characters introduced merely for the purpose of giving a greater individuality and realness, as in the comic parts of *Henry IV.*, by presenting, as it were, our very selves. Shakspere avails himself of every opportunity to effect the great object of the historic drama, that, namely, of familiar-

ising the people to the great names of their country, and thereby of exciting a steady patriotism, a love of just liberty, and a respect for all those fundamental institutions of social life which bind men together."

Shakspere, we must recollect, was now manager of a theatre, and therefore well disposed to avail himself of the advantage of a division of labour, which he could easily command. The nature of the purely historic drama presented him facilities. The history, as we have seen, forming the plot, it was possible to forecast the action in all its parts, and, after a careful perusal of Holinshed, to determine on its platform, and sketch its scaffolding in a written draught or plan of what should be done. The matter even of some scenes might be digested, and the contents of each act arranged. Such written draught or plan could then be placed in the hands of a competent playwright, and what may be called the hard work of the drama gone through. The result was then recommitted to Shakspere's discretion, and he dealt with the manuscript at his pleasure, altering, adding, omitting, rearranging, just as he would. Frequently he enlarged and developed, introducing wherever he might pure poetry, not excising it, as is too frequently the case with modern managers, who prefer that dialogue should be reduced to the briefest compass, and contain no more than is needful to explain the situation. We may perceive an instance of this enlargement and development in act iii. scenes 3 and 4, where the poetical speeches are all evidently from Shakspere's hand, and as evidently superinduced upon the

original composition. In the latter part of act iv. we may perceive the same thing, as also in the beginning of the 5th scene in act v.

Strictly as the plot of the play follows the direction of history, there was one point wherein drama exerted its peculiar claims, and would modify the facts of the chronicle. Richard's queen, Isabel, daughter of the king of France, was neither in age nor character the prototype of the Shaksperian heroine. She was, in fact, only twelve years of age at the time of the monarch's deposition, and not the grown-up sententious woman of the tragedy. The modification of the story in this particular was, no doubt, suggested by the poet to his *employé;* but I do not perceive that he felt sufficient interest in the character to bestow any of his own touches upon it.

The principal, if not only, object of his care was the king himself. On him he has expended the prodigality of his genius. He has drawn him partly as a personality, and partly as a creature of circumstances. The monarch, voluptuous by nature and culture, and coming to an inheritance capable of supplying the magnificent tastes in which he had been educated, thinks it unreasonable that the people should murmur at the cost; moreover, he claims the gratification of royal appetite as a royal right. He demands, indeed, absolute submission, and asserts an absolute prerogative of power; inordinate in his desires, vain of his position, effeminate in his feelings. His faults, however, Shakspere has touched gently, and has invested him with graces becoming a king,

who sinks as much from the irresistible course of events as from his own errors.

I think that the character of the king, as delineated in this beautiful drama, has been much misunderstood by critics, as also the intention or design of the poet. Both have been supposed to uphold the Right Divine of Kings. Shakspere has supported the principle, which, up to the period of this king's reign, had prevailed as the rule of the governing power, with true poetic impartiality. But he has also painted the commencement of an opposite rule, between which and the old doctrine a mortal struggle was to take place. The result of that struggle forms the catastrophe of the tragedy. The monarch loses not only his throne, but his theory;—a double loss, as favourable to peoples as fatal to monarchs—fatal to Richard II. and to Charles I. of England; fatal to Louis XVI. of France.

These remarks connect Shakspere with his age, and show how far he agreed with it, and how far he was in advance of it. He had not yet learned to despise royal prerogative; but he had learned to respect the popular will which imposed the needful limits on its misdirection. A living poet must write for the age in which he lives, as well as for the future; and is therefore induced to abstain from violating the manners and prejudices of his times, without betraying an unreasoning slavery to them. He may be aware that the current of opinion is setting in a certain direction, but he is not willing to go faster than the wind or the stream, though quite

ready to glide on his way gently with the aid of both. Shakspere belongs to his age; but he is also the poet of progress.

We must bear this in mind while examining the ordonnance of this play, which, though not all written by him, was all written under his direction. If, therefore, we find some portions of the dialogue inferior, yet in the structure we perceive the judgment of the master-dramatist. The beginning foreshadows the end in the imbecility of the king and the insubordination of the barons. The kingly dignity is uppermost in Richard's mind, and he is evidently convinced that his policy is necessarily superior to theirs. Bolingbroke and Mowbray are judged before they are heard:

> "High-stomached are they both, and full of ire,
> In rage deaf as the sea, hasty as fire."

Such is his opinion of them, while of himself he presupposes a certain serenity of mind that shall enable him to pronounce an impartial decision. Therefore he grants them free speech. Having heard both, he counsels them to peace, and would enforce it with the full might of his prerogative, for "lions make leopards tame." But the leopards will not be tamed; so, for the time, he is fain to consent to the ordeal of battle. The lists are formed, and Richard presides at the ceremony. But beyond the ceremony nothing is permitted. The king drops his warder, ere the combatants can strike a blow, and then orders them both into banishment for having declined his reconciliation. This equal punishment of the two litigants

he calls impartial justice. Old Gaunt perceives the folly and weakness of such a sentence, but is too much of a courtier to suggest any other. He peevishly echoes the king's mind, though in so doing he decrees his son's exile; but he cannot conceal the sorrow that it causes to himself, though he would reason Bolingbroke out of the affliction into an acquiescence in the necessity, and make him acknowledge a special virtue in the fact. And now we begin to see Shakspere's own hand in the poetry of the dialogue:

> "Think not the king did banish thee,
> But thou the king: woe doth the heavier sit,
> Where it perceives it is but faintly borne.
> Go, say I sent thee forth to purchase honour,
> And not the king exiled thee; or suppose,
> Devouring pestilence hangs in our air,
> And thou art flying to a fresher clime:
> Look, what thy soul holds dear, imagine it
> To lie that way thou goest, not whence thou comest:
> Suppose the singing birds musicians,
> The grass whereon thou tread'st the presence strewed,
> The flowers fair ladies, and thy steps no more
> Than a delightful measure, or a dance;
> For gnarling sorrow hath less power to bite
> The man that mocks at it, and sets it light."

Whereto Bolingbroke replies in that magnificent burst of poetry:

> "O! who can hold a fire in his hand,
> By thinking on the frosty Caucasus?
> Or cloy the hungry edge of appetite,
> By bare imagination of a feast?
> Or wallow naked in December snow,
> By thinking on fantastic summer's heat?
> O! no: the apprehension of the good
> Gives but the greater feeling to the worse;
> Fell sorrow's tooth doth never rankle more
> Than when it bites, but lanceth not the sore."

The death of old Gaunt is Bolingbroke's opportu-

nity. In some magnificent lines Shakspere makes Gaunt a prophet just before his decease, and gives expression to his own patriotism in verses which no Englishman can read too frequently:

> "This royal throne of kings, this sceptered isle,
> This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
> This other Eden, demi-paradise;
> This fortress, built by Nature for herself,
> Against infection and the hand of war;
> This happy breed of men, this little world,
> This precious stone set in the silver sea,
> Which serves it in the office of a wall,
> Or as a moat defensive to a house,
> Against the envy of less happier lands;
> This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
> This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,
> Feared by their breed, and famous by their birth,
> Renowned for their deeds as far from home,
> For Christian service and true chivalry,
> As is the sepulchre in stubborn Jewry
> Of the world's ransom, blessed Mary's son;
> This land of such dear souls, this dear, dear land,
> Dear for her reputation through the world,
> Is now leased out, I die pronouncing it,
> Like to a tenement or pelting farm.
> England, bound in with the triumphant sea,
> Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege
> Of watery Neptune, is now bound in with shame,
> With inky blots, and rotten parchment bonds:
> That England, that was wont to conquer others,
> Hath made a shameful conquest of itself.
> Ah! would the scandal vanish with my life,
> How happy then were my ensuing death!"

That this scandal should cease, it was needful that Richard should be removed. But the profligate king will not be warned by the words of the dying man; and so soon as the breath is out of old Gaunt's body, confiscates his personal and real estate to his own use, for the support of his Irish wars. Bolingbroke, "be-

reft and gelded of his patrimony," in his absence, is roused to exertion. He is already on the northern shore of the kingdom, and when the King marches out of it for Ireland, he marches into it, not only to reclaim his duchy of Lancaster, but to assume the throne which Richard has left unoccupied.

In the further progress of the action, we find the Bishop of Carlisle endeavouring to fortify the mind of the fallen King with the doctrine of Divine Right. And he succeeds; for the creed was flattering equally to the monarch's conscience and his hopes. So he is not slow to compare himself to the Sun which had been absent for a night, during which thieves and robbers had ventured forth; but now that he has returned, they must needs retire to their guilty holes. For,

> "Not all the water in the rough rude sea
> Can wash the balm from an anointed king;
> The breath of worldly men cannot depose
> The deputy elected by the Lord."

But his faith is destined to a rude shock. Yielding at first, he soon rallies; but a second blow reduces him to despair, and proves the hollowness of the superstition to which he had so fatally trusted. He then descends to utter reproaches on his adherents for their presumed treachery; but he is deprived of this consolation, for he is told they have perished in his defence:

> "Those whom you curse
> Have felt the worst of death's destroying wound,
> And lie full low, graved in the hollow ground."

Compelled at last to reflect, he becomes eloquent in his misery, and moralises on his fate. At length, he

submits, and retires to Flint Castle, where he is brought to parley by Bolingbroke, and induced to place himself under his protection. Adversity now sets the monarch in a new light, and he is dignified by his griefs. Gracefully he abdicates in favour of Henry IV., and expresses himself so pathetically that he moves our compassion and even reverence. But the decree has gone forth. Poor Richard is shattered with the system he had represented; and a new era is inaugurated.

And now turn we to a far different work, with a far different theme; the tragedy of the *Life and Death of King Richard III.* It has already been remarked that, in the tragedy we have just considered, the poet had not used his individualising power in the invention of a subordinate character that should add to the life of the representation; but had expended the force of that power on the principal part, the royal person himself whose deposition, and its justification, form the subject of the drama. The same is the case with *Richard III.* Every thing in the massive tragedy which bears his name is subordinated to his predominance. This wonderful drama Shakspere intended for a great work. Every speech in it bears the mark of his hand. It is all his, every word of this colossal creation.* From the slight sketch of his

* With some modification, however; for here and there a few words from the elder play do occur. Thus in the famous exclamation of Richard on Bosworth field for another horse, the old play makes him say, "A horse! a horse! a fresh horse!" Who sees not Shakspere's hand in the improvement—

"A horse! a horse! *my kingdom for* a horse!"?

predecessor he had conceived the idea of the character, and saw at once its dramatic capabilities. The germ ripened in his mind; and in due time grew up the giant tree of which it was the seed.

Shakspere was much indebted to Sir Thomas More's *History of Richard the Third* for a lively description of his character and person. In this he is accredited with wit and courage, but with far inferior "body and prowess," being little of stature, ill-featured of limbs, crook-backed, his left shoulder much higher than the right, hard-favoured of visage." He was also, adds More, "malicious, wrathful, envious, and from afore his birth ever froward." And then the scandal about the circumstances of his birth is repeated as told in the drama; and other features are added to increase the moral deformity of the picture. More's history was continued in Holinshed's Chronicle, to which also Shakspere referred. Subsequent research has considerably modified the statements both of More and Holinshed; — but the modified story would not be so well fitted for dramatic treatment. In Shakspere's tragedy the mind is preferred to the body, and in the pride of intellect all circumstances are made to give way to its energy. A further metaphysical distinction obtains, in the subordination of the moral to the intellectual, which lends to the character of Richard a satanic grandeur. The irony which marks his utterances is the result of this, and indicates his felt superiority to all that oppose him, and also to all the conventions by which men are usually bound. He pretends, however, to respect

them, for the concealment of his own purposes, and to this end affects a blunt manner, as Coleridge has remarked, "to those immediately about him;" but which is "formalised into a more set hypocrisy towards the people as represented by their magistrates." The predominance of the will in the intellect is the distinguishing trait in the motive and action throughout; and the incarnation of this spirit in an individual invests the character with a diabolic strength almost irresistible. Almost! Against all obstacles but the last it prevails. Just as it should prove its omnipotence, it meets with a divine force, by daring which it rushes on inevitable and irretrievable ruin.

Perfectly wonderful is the first act of the tragedy. There is not such another first act in the world. The poet evinced that he designed a classical work, by commencing it with a soliloquy of the principal character, in which the key-note of the whole is struck. Richard revenges himself on nature by warring against his kind. He is, too, a self-conscious villain—"subtle, false, and treacherous"—resolved to follow out his own interests, through all the perplexities of the times and the perils of party strife. He pretends to love the king's brother, the Duke of Clarence, at the very moment that he hastens on his death. His immediate plans are summed up in the ensuing lines:

> "I'll in, to urge his hatred more to Clarence,
> With lies well steeled with weighty arguments;
> And, if I fail not in my deep intent,
> Clarence hath not another day to live:
> Which done, God take King Edward to his mercy,
> And leave the world for me to bustle in."

Both expectations are fulfilled in the two first acts, together with another which he resolves upon,—his marriage with the lady Anne, whose father and whose husband he had killed. With this extraordinary wooing and wedding, the second scene of this play is occupied. In the third, we find him convulsing the court with simulated anger, at pretended wrongs done to himself; and are introduced to Queen Margaret, who suddenly breaks in on the disputants, and loads the crook-backed wretch with curses. All, however, makes for him—as he explains in a soliloquy—

> "I do the wrong, and first begin to brawl:
> The secret mischiefs that I set abroach,
> I lay unto the grievous charge of others."

Such is his plan of proceeding; and now he despatches his two murderers to slaughter poor Clarence in the Tower. The imprisoned duke has a fearful dream, prophetic of his terrible end, after which the assassins enter, and, waking up the doomed man, hold a fearful colloquy with him previous to inflicting the fatal blow. They then drown him in a butt of malmsey, according to history. One of the murderers repents, but vainly; for his companion performs the ruthless task with determination, intent only on the reward promised by Gloster.

Throughout this terrible act, the language of the dialogue is sustained at the highest elevation of poetry and passion, and never abates of its vigour in a single line. I know nothing like it in the whole range of dramatic or epic composition.

The second act operates as a sort of relief. Nevertheless it is full of life. The announcement of Clarence's death by Gloster, besides, for startling effect stands almost alone. All in the royal presence turn pale, and the king himself is so smitten at heart with the unexpected news that shortly afterwards he dies. And then again we meet with Gloster, assisted by the Duke of Buckingham, who induces the council to send for the Prince of Wales with a little train from Ludlow to be crowned king. Meanwhile "the mighty dukes, Gloster and Buckingham," commit the Lords Rivers and Grey, and Sir Thomas Vaughan, to prison at Pomfret; whereupon Queen Elizabeth pronounces these noble lines:

> "Ah me! I see the ruin of my house:
> The tiger now hath seized the gentle hind;
> Insulting tyranny begins to jet
> Upon the innocent and awless throne:
> Welcome destruction, blood, and massacre!
> *I see, as in a map, the end of all.*"

I am much struck by the versification of this tragedy. It flows onward like a mighty river. All its images are grand and direct. It has none of the breaks, and stops, and word-splitting that occur so frequently in *Richard the Second;* but all is free and broad as in the great poetical speeches of that tragedy, which are clearly Shakspere's own. Here all is of the same texture; the same mastery of thought, imagery, passion, and the same command of appropriate diction, rich, varied, and suited to the argument or the occasion. Every where the opulence of genius, adorning, directing, and wielding the most intractable matter

with an apparent ease, which, to an adept in the poetic or dramatic art, is not less than astonishing.

There is one item in the style in which this tragedy differs from *Richard the Second*. The author of that, with a peculiar neatness, adopted an artifice for the ready concentration of passion, of which we find little trace in the present tragedy. I mean a rhetorical interrogation, for the sake of an emotional answer: *e.g.*

> "What shall I say? to safeguard thine own life,
> The best way is to venge my Gloster's death."

> "Why have they dared to march
> So many miles upon her peaceful bosom,
> Frighting her pale-faced villages with war
> And ostentation of despoiling arms?
> Comest thou because th' anointed king is here?
> Why, foolish boy, the king is left behind,
> And in my loyal bosom lies his power."

> "What must the king do now? Must he submit?
> The king shall do it. Must he be deposed?
> The king shall be contented. Must he lose
> The name of king? o' God's name, let it go."

> "Who sets me else? by heaven, I'll throw at all."

The instances are numerous, and where they occur may serve to denote the hand of the playwright, as distinguished from that of Shakspere, who will be found sometimes to interpose a long affirmative passage; such as, "I'll give my jewels for a set of beads," &c., which is full of pictorial images, as is the case with other similar speeches which have been added by the great poet to the part of the fallen Richard. One curious example, however, of this interrogative style occurs in *Richard the Third*, act v. sc. 3:

"Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh.
What do I fear? Myself? there's none else by.
Richard loves Richard; that is, I am I.
Is there a murderer here? No; yes; I am;
Then fly—What, from myself? Great reason: why?
Lest I revenge. What! Myself upon myself?
Alack! I love myself. Wherefore? for any good
That I myself have done unto myself?
O! no: alas! I rather hate myself,
For hateful deeds committed by myself," &c.

This passage, I think, stands alone in the great drama to which it belongs. The exception proves the rule.

It has been thought by shallow critics that the introduction of Margaret into this tragedy is a fault, as inconsistent with history, the termagant queen being at that time in exile. Shakspere was aware of the fact, and it must be confessed wilfully departed from the record. In the tragedy he ascribes his own wilfulness to his heroine:

"*Gloster.* Wert thou not banished, on pain of death?
Q. Marg. I was; but I do find more pain in banishment
Than death can yield me here by my abode."

And this is all the reason the poet condescends to render for her presence. He had, in fact, determined to include her figure on the canvas, concluding that the historical picture would have been incomplete, had her figure been absent. And in this opinion he was right. Without her, this grand group of historical portraits would have wanted one of its grandest, and in wanting her its most characteristic portrait next to that of Richard himself. For the higher purposes of art, he therefore wilfully violated the historical record and added hers to the other portraits. In other

respects, Shakspere has followed in this tragedy the historical facts with remarkable exactitude. His great aim is to present in one magnificent whole the results of civil war; in the fall of a noble house, and in the uprise of an ambitious individual, who, in the general confusion, contrives by the basest means to ascend to the surface of things, but ultimately himself sinks with the rest. There is, accordingly, through the whole of the tragedy the feeling of a great upheaving chaos, in which the unruly passions are all at war with each other, and anarchy and destruction are the appointed preparations for an emerging cosmos. This is the terrible idea that filled the imagination of Shakspere, and which he has embodied in forms not less than titanic.

The third act shows the beginning of that "end" which Queen Elizabeth saw "as in a map." The princes are in the toils from the opening of the first scene, and Lord Hastings has to be tempted to concur in the plot against them. Hastings, from his criminality with Mrs. Shore, and his weak character, is an object of contempt to Gloster; but he proves not to be so wicked as he was thought to be, and so falls a victim to the evilly ambitious duke. The foolish man is warned of his danger, but he is self-confident, and trusts also in his supposed friend Catesby. He falls without our pity, because he has no pity for the fate of others; though he still retains his loyalty. Being told "that this same very day your enemies, the kindred of the queen, must die at Pomfret," he replies:

> "Indeed, I am no mourner for that news,
> Because they have been still my adversaries;
> But, that I'll give my voice on Richard's side,
> To bar my master's heirs in true descent,
> God knows, I will not do it, to the death."

And he thinks himself so safe in that decision, that he threatens, "ere a fortnight make him older, he'll send some packing that yet think not on't." As he proposed to do to others, so it happens to himself. And while he is speaking, Catesby knows that it will so happen, and thus moralises on the fact:

> "'Tis a vile thing to die, my gracious lord,
> When men are unprepared, and look not for 't."

And Hastings answers to this in a manner that makes us shudder. The situation is thoroughly unfolded in a few brief touches; but brief as they are, they are terrible exceedingly! Meeting with Stanley, he grows top-heavy with confidence, and intensifies his fall by remarking that life at that moment was especially dear to him. Nor does he abate a jot of his triumphant mood, when Stanley reminds him:

> "The lords at Pomfret, when they rode from London,
> Were jocund, and supposed their states were sure,
> And they, indeed, had no cause to mistrust;
> But yet, you see, how soon the day o'ercast."

There is about all this something fearfully real. It is as if we beheld the actual historical man marching on to destruction, while we, prophetic of his doom, are nevertheless powerless to save or even warn him. And notice how the following little incident completes the picture:

"*Enter a Pursuivant.*

"How now, sirrah! how goes the world with thee?
Purs. The better, that your lordship please to ask.
Hast. I tell thee, man, 'tis better with me now,
Than when thou met'st me last, where now we meet:
Then, was I going prisoner to the Tower,
By the suggestion of the queen's allies;
But now, I tell thee (keep it to thyself),
This day those enemies are put to death,
And I in better state than e'er I was.
Purs. God hold it to your honour's good content.
Hast. Gramercy, fellow. There, drink that for me.
[*Throwing him his purse.*
Purs. I thank your honour."

This arbitrary introduction of the Pursuivant, and afterwards of a Priest, merely to point the moral, is after the pattern of several scenes in Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, wherein many *rencontres* of the same kind occur, without any preparation. As we have remarked, the tragedy of *Hamlet* is also constructed on the predicated principle. A pervading feeling, a predominant idea, dictates the incident or situation; the latter contrived only for the sake of the former, and not the former growing out of the latter. Such was the school in which Shakspere learned the secret of his art, so far as such secret had been divulged to him, when he was engaged on *Hamlet*. Other secrets he had yet to learn; what these are, we shall learn with him.

After Hastings' death, the action sweeps on, and exhibits in abundant detail the dealings of Gloster and Buckingham with the Lord Mayor of London, by means of which the simple citizens are so practised on, that they proffer the crown to the usurping Duke. With this the act closes (an act of tremendous power

and effect), and with the act the second cycle of the drama.

The two next acts complete the trilogy. The character of Richard, now invested with regal supremacy, suddenly changes. He is no longer a hypocrite, but with barefaced directness demonstrates his nature, motives, and purpose, as the regal murderer, who, to confirm the power he has attained, will stop at no violence. Yet, with all this, there is something deeper. He has stifled conscience, but he has not killed it. Poor Anne, his wife, bears testimony to this fact. The companion of his bed, she has been rendered sleepless by his night-terrors. Here is her story:

> "My woman's heart
> Grossly grew captive to his honey words,
> And proved the subject of my own soul's curse:
> Which hitherto hath held mine eyes from rest;
> For never yet one hour in his bed
> Did I enjoy the golden dew of sleep,
> But with his timorous dreams was still awaked."

Shakspere would not paint the successful villain as a happy man. Nor is his boldness true courage. He fears, and to prevent this unpleasant mental action, would have the princes murdered. Buckingham hesitates, and he undertakes the business himself. He resorts to desperate courses; he plans the death of his queen. So far is history; but the poet now invents a scene, in which he brings-in again Queen Margaret, who, with Queen Elizabeth and the Duchess of York, forms a chorus, in which all the miseries of the drama are bewailed in strains terrifically tragic. The three

women sit down by one another, and utter their lamentations in verses essentially lyrical, however dramatic in form. In these utterances are combined the sublimity of the Hebrew prophets with the force and energy and concentration of the greatest of Greek tragic poets. Job and Æschylus are blended in the loud-shrieking agonies and maledictions of these distracted but majestic mourners.

Margaret leaves, but her spirit remains with Elizabeth and the duchess; and they pour out all their fury on the head of King Richard, marching with his train toward the wars. The vehemence of their exclamations places him on the defensive; and, when left alone with Queen Elizabeth, he proposes a compromise with her by marrying her daughter. It is now his turn to be deluded. By a seeming consent she disarms his suspicion, and saves her child from his immediate machinations. By some this scene has been censured as a repetition of that between him and the Lady Anne; but those who have uttered this sentence have omitted to estimate properly the historical import of the situation. Elizabeth has destined her daughter for Richmond, and their union at the termination of the tragedy reconciles for ever the Roses White and Red, whose quarrel ends with the play:

> "Proclaim a pardon to the soldiers fled,
> That in submission will return to us;
> And then, as we have ta'en the sacrament,
> We will unite the White rose and the Red:—
> Smile heaven upon this fair conjunction,
> That long hath frowned upon their enmity!—
> What traitor hears me, and says not, amen?

England hath long been mad, and scarr'd herself,
The brother blindly shed the brother's blood,
The father rashly slaughtered his own son,
The son, compelled, been butcher to the sire;
All this divided York and Lancaster,
Divided in their dire division,
O! now, let Richmond and Elizabeth,
The true succeeders of each royal house,
By God's fair ordinance conjoin together;
And let their heirs (God, if thy will be so)
Enrich the time to come with smoothfaced peace,
With smiling plenty, and fair prosperous days."

In the fact of Richard, who had so elaborately deceived Lady Anne, being in turn deceived by Queen Elizabeth, we should perceive the hand of retributive Justice; and again concede to the poet the triumph of his dramatic skill. The whole scene is formed on the model of Greek tragedy; the long speech of Richard, and the line-by-line colloquy with which it is succeeded, are exact imitations of Sophocles. Another proof, that if Shakspere departed from classical models, it was not from ignorance. The scene that follows, showing an incipient distraction in Richard's mind, is after a more romantic model, and full of modern stage-effects. Of so composite a type are the greater manifestations of Shakspere's genius. Altogether this is a wonderful act.

The concluding scenes are all action. The wheels of the chariot of destiny quicken in their motion; and self-willed ambition, however strong in courage and resolve, must yield to the predestined fate. Moral and physical laws coöperate against the presumptuous mortal who would act independently of both. Different as they are in their conditions, one of them acting

as freely as the other necessarily, the end of their mutual working is equally certain; there is no possible difference in the result. In the arrival of this result, the poet is anxious to vindicate the justice of heaven, not only in the case of Richard, but that of others. Buckingham, for instance, is made to confess it in the doom that falls on himself:

> "This is the day, which, in King Edward's time,
> I wished might fall on me, when I was found
> False to his children, or his wife's allies:
> This is the day, wherein I wished to fall
> By the false faith of him whom most I trusted:
> This, this All-Souls' day to my fearful soul
> Is the determined respite of my wrongs.
> That high All-Seer, which I dallied with,
> Hath turned my feigned prayer on my head,
> And given in earnest what I begged in jest.
> Thus doth he force the swords of wicked men
> To turn their own points in their masters' bosoms."

Such was the theology of Shakspere,—such his view of the moral government of the world; partly as the teaching of that Bible with which he and his age had happily become acquainted, and partly of that philosophy which they both had the honour of inaugurating. Of that Providence which so "commends the ingredients of the poisoned chalice" to the lips of the treacherous guilty, Henry Earl of Richmond appears on the scene as the appointed agent, whose mission it is to exterminate from the land

> "The reckless, bloody, and usurping boar,
> That spoiled your summer fields and fruitful vines,
> Swills your warm blood like wash, and makes his trough
> In your embowelled bosoms."

Yes; he, even he, is engaged for the destruction of

this "foul swine:" but Richard is still hopeful, and looks forward unto "to-morrow, as a busy day;" nevertheless, his wonted alacrity and cheer of mind forsake him ere he finally retires to rest. On the other hand, Richmond is full of confidence in Heaven and the goodness of his cause. And now both are sleeping in their tents; between which arise the shadows of Prince Edward, King Henry, the Duke of Clarence, Hastings, the two young princes, Queen Anne, and Buckingham—like Powers of the Invisible World—who pronounce a curse on Richard, and a blessing on Richmond. The immortality of the soul is not only a truth, but gives to the murdered an advantage over the assassin, who can injure them no longer, while they have the privilege of arming Justice by their prayers against "the bloody and the guilty," and in favour of the injured:

> "Be cheerful, Richmond; for the wronged souls
> Of butchered princes fight in thy behalf."

And the end is, as the Immortalities would have it:

> "God and good Angels fight on Richmond's side,
> And Richard falls in height of all his pride."

Indignation is awakened when we recollect that a poem like this, on which the greatest genius of the world has literally poured out the magnificence of his soul, should have been treated by sciolists and shallow playwrights as a mere chaos, from the matrix of which an easily acted drama might be dug, and not as already a drama perfect in design and finish. But such is the case, and the shrunk and supplemented product

has usurped the stage, and engrossed the services of actors who have, nevertheless, pretended loyalty to Shakspere's sovereignty. Herein they have merely consulted their convenience, by reducing the mighty work of the master dramatist within the limitations of their own meaner powers. And they have been enabled to do this, because there is no public authority to control such base proceedings, and public taste had not yet been sufficiently educated to refuse its patronage to such desecration, or even to know that such a crime had been committed. An age is coming, when knowledge, thoroughly imparted to the people, shall render such guilt impossible, and secure to genius the claims which never should have been questioned—the rights which to violate is the grossest impiety—the most awful sacrilege.

Having now so definitively realised the consummation of a long series of events, part of which he had also dealt with in other plays, it was natural that Shakspere should look back to the original movement out of which they proceeded. *Richard II.* has already instanced the interest which he took in the Plantagenet line of the monarchs of England, followed as it had been by the houses of Lancaster, of York, and of Tudor. He wished to trace these developments to their germ. He seems, however, to have avoided touching on the difficulties between Church and State, and preferred to take a little later period, when the question confined itself more exclusively to state conditions. Passing, therefore, over the reigns of Henry II. and Richard Cœur de Lion, he fixed on

that of King John. Already on that subject was a play* existing; and, temporarily exhausted with the prodigious effort which it evidently cost him to throw out with such titanic force and vigour the tragedy of *Richard III.*, Shakspere was willing to avail himself of a predecessor's labour. Taking the outline and body of the old play, he was content with amending and condensing its contents, and with interposing some glowing poetic speeches, thus adding to its effect, and stamping a value on it which otherwise it would not have possessed. It is curious that in this old play, as in Shakspere's adaptation, there is no mention of Magna Charta; nor does Shakspere himself appear to have consulted Holinshed's Chronicles, in order to correct the details in the drama. The barons, indeed, in the older drama, are exhibited as in arms against the king; but the cause of their rebellion is not clearly explained, whether in defence of their own liberties, or as partisans of France and supporters of the Pope. Shakspere gave to them a more definite action, connected with John's conduct toward Prince Arthur. He did not, however, altogether neglect the papal influence, but portrayed it as a kind of destiny hovering in the background, and occasionally interfering with international relations.

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* This old play is in two parts, and thus entitled: "The troublesome Raigne of John King of England, with the Discoverie of King Richard Cordelion's base Sonne (vulgarly named the Bastard Fauconbridge); also, the Death of King John at Swinstead Abbey" (1591). There is a still older drama by Bishop Bale; but his *Kynge John* appears not to have been known either by Shakspere, or the author of "The troublesome Raigne."

The author of the old play had done more than this; he had introduced a scene illustrative of the depravity of the monastic orders, in which merry nuns and friars are made to figure in a farcical manner, when Faulconbridge makes the tour of the kingdom to extort money from the clergy. This view of the matter, as I have just said, Shakspere had no wish to take; and preferred dealing with the Pope in his more dignified position as arbitrator in national disputes, or as claiming tithe and toll in other realms than his own. It is evident that the poet was inclined to treat the clergy with respect; and that his aim in refashioning the tragedy was exclusively political. This aim has become the central idea of the subject, and in his hands regulates its treatment. The dispute between the brother of the late king and the nephew of the latter to the throne, originates the action of the play. Shakspere, however, does not touch on the fact that in the thirteenth century hereditary right was not uniformly regarded, or that without the consent of parliament no king could reign, and that, in fact, parliament did confer the crown on John, preferring him to the young Arthur, then only eleven years of age. On the other hand, history records that, notwithstanding the said fact, John was jealous of his nephew's pretensions, and having succeeded in securing him as a prisoner, took care that nothing more should be heard of him. Young Arthur was imprisoned, according to Holinshed, first in Falais and subsequently at Rouen, where he was supposed to have been murdered. The old play confines him some-

where in England; and, as it was convenient to the conduct of the plot, Shakspere unhesitatingly adopted the suggestion. Indeed, in its story and stage-arrangements he copies almost implicitly the old play; portraying John as an usurper, and Arthur as the rightful heir,—a view which lends a pathos to the story not intrinsically belonging to it, but fitting it better for a dramatic purpose.

In other respects, Shakspere has done more justice to John than history. The latter describes this monarch as weak and cowardly, taking the circumstances in which the man was placed for his character. Shakspere regards him more properly as the representative of the country, and the exponent of her policy. Those epithets belong as much to England as to him. In truth, they are strictly inapplicable to either, but are crude substitutes for terms more philosophical descriptive of the time and people. John's troubles are England's troubles, and both have to meet them with what means they can extemporise. The state is internally unsettled and externally endangered. We have to wait for the inter-action of the inward and outward forces, which in the end conducts by a painful process to their reconciliation. Only by being faithful to herself can England withstand a foreign foe; and this fidelity of all parties to a common national interest may only be secured by a series of trials showing the bitter evils of civil contention. This notion of interest, then, is the idea embodied in the tragedy and in its characters. The national interest receives its incarnation in the person of John,

who stands accordingly for the Policy of England. It is not either as a good or bad man individually that John is painted; but simply as a politician. Even to the end of the tragedy, notwithstanding his crimes, John is spoken of with respect. Thus says the noble Salisbury, returning to his allegiance, in act v. sc. 4:

> "Beshrew my soul,
> But I do love the favour and the form
> Of this most fair occasion, by the which
> We will untread the steps of damned flight;
> And like a hated and retired flood,
> Leaving our rankness and irregular course,
> Stoop low within those bounds we have o'erlooked,
> And calmly run on in obedience,
> *Even to our ocean, to our great King John.*"

Yes; "great," just as England was then; no greater, but no less. England's Policy was impersonated in John; in Salisbury no policy at all. In the latter, we have merely the natural man, noble of mind, strong in love, an excellent friend and neighbour, but no politician. His good feelings lead him into political errors, and so much at last he practically acknowledges. The poet shows in this, that, in his idea and mode of treating the historical transactions, he transcended the pettier moralities of private life, and fixed his attention exclusively on their political and national issues.

Salisbury attracts no attention until the fourth act, and then contributes rather to the poetry than the action of the drama. He is recusant against the second coronation of John, for which he cannot appreciate the subtle reason that led to the monarch's

submission to it as a desirable expediency. In his opinion,

> "to be possessed with double pomp,
> To guard a title that was rich before,
> To gild refined gold, to paint the lily,
> To throw a perfume on the violet,
> To smooth the ice, or add another hue
> Unto the rainbow, or with taper-light
> To seek the beauteous eye of heaven to garnish,
> Is wasteful and ridiculous excess."

He takes the most obvious, not a recondite, view of affairs; he stands also on the ancient ways, and dislikes novelties. Understanding that Arthur is dead, he affects no reticence, puts no restraint on his feelings, but goes all lengths in disaffection:

> "It is apparent foul-play; and 'tis shame
> That greatness should so grossly offer it.
> So thrive it in your game; and so farewell."

Faulconbridge tells him and Pembroke plainly afterwards that "there is little reason in his grief," and that "impatience has only privilege to hurt his master, no man else." But there is no chance of his listening to reason or argument; for the sight of the mangled body of the prince, fallen from the castle-walls, transports him into an ecstasy of passion. He will accept no explanation, but gives his fancy free wing, and allows his "hasty spleen" to follow suggestion into the wildest suspicions.

We next meet with Salisbury at the French court. He is still the same man. His feelings outrun his reason. He has combined with the stranger against his country, upon what he considers good grounds,

yet he cannot restrain his patriotic lamentations. For

> "such is the infection of the time,
> That, for the health and physic of our right,
> We cannot deal but with the very hand
> Of stern injustice and confused wrong."

Most remarkable is Lewis's reply to this manifestation of an insupportable sorrow — an irrepressible remorse:

> "A noble temper dost thou show in this;
> And great affections struggling in thy bosom
> Do make an earthquake of nobility.
> O! what a noble combat hast thou fought,
> Between compulsion and a brave respect!
> Let me wipe off this honourable dew,
> That silverly doth progress on thy cheeks.
> My heart hath melted at a lady's tears,
> Being an ordinary inundation;
> But this effusion of such manly drops,
> This shower, blown up by tempest of the soul,
> Startles mine eyes, and makes me more amazed,
> Than had I seen the vaulty top of heaven
> Figured quite o'er with burning meteors.
> Lift up thy brow, renowned Salisbury,
> And with a great heart heave away this storm:
> Commend these waters to those baby eyes,
> That never saw the giant-world enraged;
> Nor met with fortune other than at feasts,
> Full of warm blood, of mirth, of gossiping."

But Lewis himself anon has to yield to passionate impulse, when Pandulph enters with the news that John has reconciled himself to the pontiff. France, as little as England, will be "propertied," or consent merely to underplay the game of crafty Rome. The name of "holy Church" sinks before that of the dearer State, nor will Lewis sacrifice the latter to the policy of the former. To Pandulph's remark that "you look but on the outside of this work," Lewis replies:

> "Outside or inside, I will not return
> Till my attempt so much be glorified,
> As to my ample hope was promised."

Shockingly must Salisbury's confidence have been shaken by this scene. The legate whom Lewis had invoked "to give a warrant from the hand of heaven, and on his actions set the name of right with holy breath," had already sanctioned the cause of John instead. The revolted baron, indeed, says nothing; but when we next meet with him, he is in a state of surprise at the promising prospects of the English monarch:

> "I did not think the king so stored with friends."

With these words he opens the scene; and when Count Melun is led in wounded, to disclose the intended treachery of the French court against "the revolts of England," he is prepared to believe the warning, and hesitates not for a second to return to his allegiance. From that moment England is safe. When her princes shall have come home again, then will the Bastard proclaim the national conviction that,

> "Come the three quarters of the world in arms,
> And we shall shock them. Nought shall make us rue,
> If England to itself but rest as true."

Shakspere found the character of Faulconbridge in the elder play, but he so remodelled the character as to make it the exponent of the ruling idea of his own. Faulconbridge serves the poet as a kind of chorus; and thus at the end of the second act delivers a lecture on Commodity (or Interest), which Shakspere was careful to add in this place as a soliloquy,

not to be found in the old play. It was to this idea, thus in his usual manner introduced, that he trusted, as the principle of internal unity, by which all the characters and details of the action should be linked together. Such was Shakspere's sublime notion of dramatic unity, and which he so wisely substituted for the empirical unities of the Greek drama, which grew merely out of the conveniences of its limited stage. By it he elevated the English drama above the sphere of the accidental, and gave to it a philosophical life, which will permanently secure its status at the highest attainable level of poetical endeavour, and invested it with an epic character that will be eternal; a life independent of the stage and its conditions, and which will continue to interest the human race, as a written register of human thought and feeling, long after it shall have ceased to be acted.

Shakspere here views the character of the Bastard on the best side. Faulconbridge owes his good fortune to his irregular birth, and therefore is not tempted to resentment on that account, like Edmund in *Lear*. Of a rough humour in the beginning, but rising soon to the dignity of his new position, he finds in his occupation a motive to seriousness, and enters on his work with the earnestness of a busy man, who has his way in the world to make. Examples teem around him of self-interestedness, and therefore he is not ashamed, but rather encouraged, to regard Gain as his deity. His experience of kings and worldly policies begets in him a spirit of irony, which he is not slow to indulge. Nevertheless, he is

through all faithful to his sovereign and the land, and steadily wins his way upward by force of his fidelity and independence. He is a partisan who is never even tempted to forsake his cause, either by internal motive or external circumstance, but fits into his place as exactly as it fits him. His courage and daring enable him to encounter all dangers, and carry him successfully through all enterprises. To King John he is an invaluable servant, and is esteemed by all for his boldness and honesty, as well as feared for his straightforward and precipitate valour.

The action of this tragedy is partly dependent on the past, and we must go as far back as the reign of Henry II. if we would understand the personal relations of some of the characters. In the previous reign the barons of England, taking advantage of the lax authority of Stephen, set up for themselves as petty sovereigns, built castles, and fortified their mansions. The king, to resist them, called in the aid of foreigners, by which matters were made worse. Meanwhile Matilda, the daughter of Henry I., who had married the Count of Anjou, endeavoured to gain the crown of England, contended for it during fourteen years, and in 1141 ascended the throne,—the king having been taken prisoner,—and retained it for a short period. Stephen regained his liberty and his power. Eleven years afterwards, Henry, the son of Matilda, invaded England; but to avoid the continuance of civil war, an understanding was come to that Stephen should reign during his life, but Henry

succeed to the crown. And thus it was that in 1154 the Plantagenet line commenced in England in the person of Henry II.

The new king was exceedingly popular, and restored many of the Saxon laws. In earlier life he followed the council of Thomas à Becket, the most versatile of men, who became successively Lord Chancellor and Archbishop of Canterbury. When he became the latter, he turned upon the monarch who had trusted him, and advocated the absurd claims of the clergy, which Henry had wished to discourage. Becket was thus placed in opposition to the Barons, and ultimately fell a victim to his own temerity and arrogance. Henry, meanwhile, was unhappy in his domestic relations; Eleanor his queen being jealous of his gallantries, and stirring up her children against their father. Henry, Geoffrey, and Richard, his sons, assumed an attitude of rebellion against him; and even his favourite son John was found in a list of traitors' names. Henry II. died cursing his children; and was succeeded by his son Richard, surnamed Cœur-de-Lion.

The new king occupied himself with the Crusades. Returning from Palestine to England, he was seized by the Duke of Austria, and was sold to the Emperor of Germany, by whom he was imprisoned in the castle of Tiernsteign. After thirteen months' confinement he was ransomed by his subjects; and soon after commenced a war with France. Laying siege to the castle of the Baron of Limoges, he was wounded by an arrow, and died of mortification.

And now John, the youngest son of Henry II., succeeded to the throne, although by lineal right Arthur, his brother Geoffrey's child, was the next heir. Such is the state of things which we find at the opening of the tragedy. We find him seated on the throne, with his mother Queen Eleanor (Elinor) at his side, his politic counsellor, giving audience to the French ambassador, who is charged to assert the claim of young Arthur, whose cause has been taken up by Philip, king of France. John answers him indignantly and defiantly. Eleanor then expresses an opinion that the contingency might have been avoided by more adroit management. She was convinced, and had ever said,

> "How that ambitious Constance would not cease,
> Till she had kindled France, and all the world,
> Upon the right and party of her son."

Here are the whole elements of the drama at one view. Eleanor and John, however, are at issue upon one point. The latter exclaims,

> "Our strong possession, and our right for us;"

to which Eleanor replies,

> "Your strong possession, much more than your right,
> Or else it must go wrong with you and me:
> So much my conscience whispers in your ear,
> Which none but heaven, and you, and I, shall hear."

John, strong in the assent of his parliament, acts, throughout the drama, on his own opinion. It is only the enemies of England who advocate the contrary; others, like Eleanor, may inwardly confess to its truth, but they are politicly silent. The remainder of the first act is exclusively concerned with the

establishment of Faulconbridge's lineage as an illegitimate son of Cœur-de-Lion, and his determination to follow the king's fortune in the wars.

The second act exhibits John in action, nothing doubtful of his cause, but brave and self-reliant. We find him opposed by France, and that Austria which had betrayed Richard into the hands of the German emperor; these powers having taken up the cause of Constance and her son, who also in person are on the scene. The dispute is for the town of Angiers; but the townsmen, answering from the walls, declare their resolve to maintain their neutrality, until the right to the crown of England is determined. Meanwhile, Eleanor and Constance parley, both in violent mood, the first implying the bastardy of Arthur,—a taunt which Constance repays with interest, and truth. Austria and Faulconbridge interpose in the quarrel, and add to the war of insolent words. Poor Arthur, meanwhile, is only grieved that he should be made the occasion of contention, which, if left to himself, he would avoid. After some conflict between the two armies, a composition is agreed to, by which it is settled that Lewis the dauphin should wed Blanch of Castile, niece to the king of England, a lady whom Eleanor has brought with her, and by whose advice John concedes to the suggestion. Nor are Arthur's rights wholly forgotten. John promises to create young Arthur duke of Bretagne and earl of Richmond, and make him lord of the fair town of Angiers. With Blanch, likewise, he gives to France Volquessen, Touraine, Maine, Poictiers, and Anjou,

five provinces—an arrangement which excites the Bastard's indignation:

> "Mad world! mad kings! mad composition!
> John, to stop Arthur's title in the whole,
> Hath willingly departed with a part;
> And France, whose armour conscience buckled on,
> Whom zeal and charity brought to the field,
> As God's own soldiers,"

swayed by motives of self-interest, consents to be drawn

> "from his own determined aim,
> From a resolved and honourable war,
> To a most base and vile-concluded peace."

Admirably are all these political relations brought before the audience, and clearly illustrated, together with the motives by which each party is influenced; succinctly and yet vitally—in about some eight hundred lines, every one with a pulse of life in it; not all of them Shakspere's certainly, but all of them adopted by him, some of them improved, and some of them added. And this operation is conducted with such skill, that the work seems all of a piece.

And now the hand of Shakspere is to become more conspicuous in this refashionment of an already accepted drama. The lady Constance, the mother of Arthur, arrests his attention; and on her portrait he resolves to expend the resources of his dramatic art. John had vainly thought that the dame, ambitious as she was, would be satisfied with his politic arrangements. Her great soul disdains all compromise, and she pours forth her indignation in strains of matchless eloquence—with which only a poet like Shakspere could supply her—an unequalled wealth of

words expressing thoughts transcendantly sublime and pathetic. Austria comes in for a share of her vituperation, richly merited, as the poet evidently thinks, by the share it had in Richard's capture. The picture drawn of the country, in that of its Archduke, is true of it up to this very hour:

> "O Austria! thou dost shame
> That bloody spoil: thou slave, thou wretch, thou coward;
> Thou little valiant, great in villany!
> Thou ever strong upon the stronger side!
> Thou fortune's champion, that dost never fight
> But when her humorous ladyship is by
> To teach thee safety!"

Such a character, and the conduct, too, which it implies, is partly due to the political and geographical position of the country.

In the midst of these domestic troubles enters Pandulph, the pope's legate, demanding of John why he has refused to sanction the pope's selection of Stephen Langton for the archbishopric of Canterbury. In the answer given to this demand by John the voice of England speaks, and shows how strictly the king is identified with the country. It is not the individual that we hear, but the impersonate people. The politics the words express are eminently Shaksperian—the politics of the Sonnets.

> "What earthly name to interrogatories
> Can task the free breath of a sacred king?
> Thou canst not, cardinal, devise a name
> So slight, unworthy, and ridiculous,
> To charge me to an answer, as the pope.
> Tell him this tale; and *from the mouth of England*
> Add thus much more,—that no Italian priest
> Shall tithe or toll in our dominions;
> But as we under heaven are supreme head,

So, under heaven, that great supremacy,
Where we do reign, we will alone uphold,
Without the assistance of a mortal hand.
So tell the pope; all reverence set apart
To him and his usurped authority."

This decided Protestantism appears to King Philip blasphemy; and the legate proceeds to pronounce the papal interdict. And thus it happens that the prayer of Constance is heard, who, in her great agony, had invoked the supreme powers:

"Arm, arm, you heavens, against these perjured kings!
A widow cries; be husband to me, heavens!
Let not the hours of this ungodly day
Wear out the day in peace; but, ere sun set,
Set armed discord 'twixt these perjured kings!
Hear me! O, hear me!"

She was heard; and, behold the result. The treaty between the kings is broken. Philip is afraid to continue in friendship with excommunicated John. So far Constance has her wish;—but it is fatal to herself. In the conflict that ensues, France is the loser, and her "pretty Arthur" becomes a captive to John. Then follows the pouring forth of the bereaved mother's sorrows, in all that pathos and plenitude of eloquence which marked the scene that opened the act. Infinite pathos! incomparable eloquence! She grieves not alone; for Lewis the Dauphin now utters lamentations for his country's loss; but, unlike her, he is comforted by Pandulph, who, with all a priest's crafty sophistry, makes him apprehend a real advantage in the apparent misfortune. And thus concludes the third act, the greatest act of the tragedy, and, as in other instances, completing the cycle.

The fourth act is occupied with the episode of Prince Arthur and his death. In this transaction King John appears as an individual, and we are made acquainted with his personal character, as distinct from his representative one. Policy and self-interest still sway him; but there is a certain majesty in his guilt, and a conscientious humanity in his repentance.

In the fifth act we see him in compelled subservience to Rome. Pandulph has triumphed. Nevertheless Rome has overreached herself. By her alliance with England she has forfeited France. Lewis, justly indignant, sets no bounds to his passion, and determines to satisfy his anger, even on the English nobles who have forsaken John and joined the French cause. This treachery of the Dauphin, of course, alienates them, and they return to their allegiance. John, however, falls a victim to these complicated events, and dies, poisoned by an Italian monk, before the news of a fresh disaster can reach him. Of this Faulconbridge is the bearer. But in his heroic determination we know that England is safe; besides, the politic Pandulph has already prevailed on the Dauphin to withdraw from his enterprise.

Shakspere's contemporaries did not perceive what we now perceive, that in such alterations of elder plays he manifested a power superior to that possessed by the playwrights by whom the subjects were introduced to the stage. Hence it is that Greene, notwithstanding his own great talents as a dramatist, left a depreciatory notice of Shakspere in his posthumous work, called *Groat's-Worth of Wit bought*

with a Million of Repentance. He characterises him as "an upstart crow, beautified in our feathers, that with his tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you, and, being an absolute *Johannes Factotum*, is, in his own conceit, the only Shakes-scene in a country." But this passage affords proof that at this time Shakspere was a successful man, and not only a poet and actor, but a man of business. He had undertaken the regulation of the theatre, and was absolute in more than one department.

In the year in which he was engaged on *The Second Part of Henry VI.*, Shakspere caused his *Venus and Adonis* to be published, which poem, in the dedication, he calls, as we have said, "the first heir of his invention." Probably the poem had been composed at Stratford, previous to his Hegira; and we may see in it how Shakspere had exerted and trained his poetical faculty before he aimed at dramatic production. The poem soon acquired popularity; for next year, 1594, it arrived at a second edition; and the poem of *Lucrece* was also published. The same year the Globe Theatre was built.

Shakspere was now, it is evident, recognised at least as a poet; and in 1595 we find Spenser expressing himself more reconciled with Shakspere's having forsaken Thalia for a more dolorous muse. In his poem, *Colin Clout's come again*, he writes:

> "And there, though last not least, is Ætion;
> A *gentler* shepherd may nowhere be found;
> Whose muse, full of high thought's invention,
> Doth *like himself* heroically sound."

His name, too, now occurs with that of other poets in other publications, and particularly in a University play, called *The Returne from Pernassus*, in which allusion is made to some quarrel between Ben Jonson and Shakspere. Our poet is said to have had not only the best of the contest, but the right on his side. A greater trouble, however, than a quarrel with a brother artist befel him in 1596—that of the death of his son Hamnet, who died on August 11th.

The reputation of *Venus and Adonis* increased, for in the same year a third edition was published.

It had evidently been the ambition of Shakspere to entitle himself to the rank and title of a gentleman; and at this time it would appear that he was desirous of authoritatively assuming both. He seems, therefore, to have prompted his father to apply to the Heralds' College for a grant of arms; and a draft of such grant (1596) is still preserved in the College of Arms.

To return.

The tragedy of *King John* is admirable in structure, and capable of being placed on the stage without alteration. It is, indeed, almost as classical for its regularity, as it is for the genius displayed in it. We may judge from it not only the merits of Shakspere, but those of the playwrights capable of assisting him. The art of historical tragedy, when that of *The Troublesome Raigne* was published, had far advanced. Shakspere found the skeleton complete; he clothed it with flesh and blood, and added to it beauty. He quickened the body with a soul, and

inspired it with an idea; but its mechanism had already been mastered by inferior minds. Our poet was an artist among artists. He could measure himself by others. If among the giants of that elder time he seems a giant, we may judge more accurately of his actual stature than if we measured him by himself alone. But not only may he be compared with his predecessors and contemporaries advantageously, but in many points he presents a perfect contrast to them. It is, for instance, as a politician and philosopher that Shakspere shines in this magnificent tragedy; as the latter, manifesting an equality with Bacon—in certain aspects, indeed, a superiority. In the transcendental elements of metaphysical science he was far in advance of the learned chancellor, and anticipated the most important discoveries of modern thinkers. And he was all this without ostentation: bearing, in the garden of his mind, philosophy and poetry as naturally as the tree bears fruit; and improving as gradually in power and abundance, as, in more earthly gardens, the most excellent fruit-trees may be made to do, by the aid of cultivation, and the application of diligence and skill.

CHAPTER II.

Fancy and Memory—"The Merchant of Venice"—The characters of Shylock and Portia—"Midsummer-Night's Dream"—Shakspere's theory of poetic creation.

I SEEM to see clearly that with *Richard III.* and *King John* Shakspere's dramatic education was completed. He had now only to apply the results. In the first instance he had exercised his Imagination, which, in his elementary and impulsive period, was naturally predominant, and, it may be added, somewhat self-nourished. As yet the material in which to embody his teeming ideas was deficient. He was, however, not wanting in such classical learning as he had leisure to attain; and had made excursions into the more popular pleasure-grounds of romance, which offered to him greater freedom of movement, and permitted him to reincarnate in novel forms old feelings, old sentiments, and old ideas. Even his earlier, more mechanical works, therefore, have a flexibility of form, not attainable by minds exclusively cultivated in classical studies. It is clear, too, that he consulted men as well as books; and sought to make use of his personal experiences, as well as of his derived learning, in his successive compositions. And thus there grew up within himself and them an indi-

vidual life, which became more and more distinctive at every fresh step that he took in his progress as an artist, and marked his improvement as a dramatic poet.

Imagination, however, works rather monotonously, unless fed from without at a variety of sources. It needs the means and the results of association, for the formation of a diction ample enough to express adequately the infinite ideas which, though few in themselves, originate a greater number of conceptions that are ready at once to emerge in a really countless multitude of sensible intuitions. Appeal, therefore, must be made to two faculties of the mind, nearly allied, Fancy and Memory. Of these it has been rightly said, that Fancy is merely memory absolved from the order of time; whereas Memory proper is exclusively chronological. Shakspere, in his second period of development, consulted these with diligence and judgment, and has left the results. Memory brought for him from the old chronicles those historical events which he has immortalised in so many of his dramas; and Fancy provided him with materials which he might combine as he pleased, in any order of position or succession, either according to his judgment or caprice.

Of the latter we have an instance in his charming comedy, *The Merchant of Venice.* Two stories, united with singular skill, form the basis of this production. Both stories are to be found among the *Gesta Romanorum*, and that of the Jew in the *Pecorone* of Giovanni Fiorentino. Shakspere may also

have been indebted to an older play, and to a tale by Massuccio di Salerno (1470), from which the loves of Jessica and Lorenzo may have been borrowed. If we accept this, we have a triad supporting the narrative superstructure of the Shaksperian drama. But more than all these, Shakspere was indebted to the knowledge of the world which he had elsewhere attained, and to his reflections on the mystery of life, inward and outward, which had now become the habit of his mind.

The peculiarity of the character of Shylock must at once have suggested to Shakspere the leading idea of his drama. Shylock's appeal was to the Law —the Law in its letter—regardless of justice or the claims of humanity. To this was to be opposed the Christian idea of Mercy as moderating Justice, and of Law in its spirit as frequently modifying its letter. In the end, too, he had to reconcile the letter and the spirit, by showing that the apparent opposition is due to a malicious or incomplete interpretation of the former, and that if the letter is regarded on all its sides it will not prove to be so contradictory as it seemed at first on a one-sided and cursory view. This is a much more orthodox mode of proceeding than many of our divines have adopted; but it will be found to be one eminently rational. To a revengeful and partial interpretation of the letter, the Jew was naturally prone, not only by the carnality of his nature, but by the pariah level to which his race had been reduced as a class, in a state of society unfavourable to his recognition. In the relations of Law, Shak-

spere forgot not its relation to Justice; and with the latter identified his own genius. Justice, as tempered with Mercy, was, at any rate, to be administered by him to his dramatic persons; and he began by applying the same to Shylock. He took no prejudiced view of the character of the despised Hebrew, but referred what was objectionable in it to his condition among a people by whom he was egregiously injured and insulted. For the rest, he most eloquently pointed out that, in his natural feelings, the poor Jew was as much a man as a Christian, the same in his appetites, and alike in his sufferings. We are told that, during Shakspere's life, Shylock was acted by Burbadge with a form and aspect exceedingly frightful, with a long nose and with red hair. This must have been especially disgusting to the gentle Shakspere, and may serve to show that at this time the poet, notwithstanding his later triumphs, was yet dependent on his actors, and they, in their turn, on popular opinion. Even through such a mask, so thick and so distorted, had Shakspere to insinuate those divine human sentiments which were intended ultimately to accomplish the redemption of an entire nation, and restore a whole people to the common rights of man.

And now turning to this poor individual Shylock, the victim of injury and insult;—by whom had he been wronged? By a princely merchant—one with whom Shylock had frequent dealings; for Shylock is a merchant too, and therein lies the sting of their mutual repugnancy. The pariah of society

here challenges the same status for himself as the favoured son of fortune, rich in friends and high in the esteem of honourable men. Antonio is so well to do that he is even overrun with *ennui*, and for excitement suffers himself to be irritated whenever he meets with Shylock, and exhibits his contempt for him in a rude and violent manner. Too easy in his own circumstances, and enabled to lend money to his acquaintance without demanding interest, he cannot help despising the outcast money-lender who obtains a living by usury. And this he conceives to be a virtue in himself and a vice in the rival trader; which is neither in either, but merely the result of their opposite circumstances. Antonio has to be taught this as a lesson, and to be made a better man by the teaching.

Providence is preparing for him a fiery trial by which his nature is to be purified; and it is to be hoped that his fellow sinner is to be made repentant of the crimes on which, in the malice of his heart, he had determined. This liberal splenetic gentleman is desirous of assisting an acquaintance of extravagant habits but noble nature, with whom he sympathises, and to whose aspirations to achieve an important social position he has already contributed; but, in order to effect his wish, is compelled to seek a temporary loan from Shylock, who, disguising his purpose, consents to lend the sum required on his entering into "a merry bond" for the repayment. All this is settled accordingly; and then Bassanio bids farewell to his friend Antonio, and sets forth for Bel-

mont, where he induces the wealthy Portia to become his bride.

In the character of Portia we have one of those strong-minded women whom hitherto it had been the poet's delight to portray. In the early scenes we find her possessed of a masculine wit, with an intellect beyond the limits of feminine development. She has been fortunate in her birth, in her wealth, and in her culture; and stands almost on the same level with the most highly cultivated man. That such a woman should see worth in Bassanio speaks greatly in his favour. But he has much in him to be corrected; and for him also the trial appointed for Antonio is, in its degree, necessary.

To this lofty and large-minded woman Shakspere confides the advocacy of the central idea of his drama. It is addressed to Shylock in her appeal to him for mercy toward his debtor, whose life, in his opinion, lies at his disposal. She carefully conceals from him that his opinion is erroneous, and that it is himself who stands in danger of the law which he has so imperfectly studied. This reticence on her part aids the dramatic structure of the scene, and finally brings out the situation with the greatest possible force. The surprise at once throws Shylock off his equilibrium. He has appealed to the letter of the law, and by the letter of the law he and his cause are alike disabled.

I think I see in the character of Portia some resemblance to Anne Hathaway, who I believe belonged to the same class of female character. Early

in life the mother of three children, prudence induced her to acquiesce in the propriety of her husband quitting his native place for London—perhaps alone—in order to push his fortune unincumbered with family cares. Patiently she appears to have borne this enforced absence,—though occasionally, it is not doubted, she visited London,—and to have been in the end rewarded for her magnanimous self-denial. In due time her husband returned wholly to her, crowned with success, and with a competence that secured for the close of life the most complete domestic felicity. On both sides I perceive in this arrangement consummate prudence, and utterly repudiate the vulgar notions on the subject that pass current with shallow minds. Those who positively condemn early marriages forget or overlook what may be said in their favour. In my experience of life I have known energetic men and women, whose early independence was due to their having accepted each other as partners while as yet they had nothing but hope and courage, but who by their mutual fidelity achieved a conquest of fortune. Such brave souls trust in Providence, and are rewarded for their trust. Faithful to their God and themselves, the beginning of their career is as much exempt from the charge of improvidence or rashness as the end. On the other hand, how many commencing life with a certain provision have soon squandered it; or, resting content with their portion however small, have failed to augment it in any way, albeit favourable circumstances have continually presented themselves! Without sufficient motive for

exertion, they prefer the indolence of unearned repose to the recompenses that surely follow on well-directed labour. Shakspere was not acquainted with Malthusian theories, and was opposed on principle to celibacy. A fervent advocate for marriage, he willingly, nay rejoicingly and defiantly, accepted it with its responsibilities and perils. "Get thee a wife, get thee a wife: there is no staff more reverent than one tipped with horn."

The subordinate characters in *The Merchant of Venice* are admirably suited to the principals, and are all in harmony with the unity of the play, as well as contributory to the variety of the action. They are far from faultless individuals; but they are credited for negative virtues in the absence of positive merits. Notwithstanding their follies and their foibles, we still sympathise with them, and respect them for certain small specialities otherwise indifferent, but that we have contracted an acquaintance with the parties themselves, which disposes us to apologise for their eccentricities, and compassionate their errors. Thus Jessica is an undutiful daughter; but the blame of this is chargeable on her father, who has brought her up in a manner against which her finer sense has revolted. We do not pity him when she robs him of the gold and jewels that she gives to her lover; but recognise a certain equity in their furtively taking what we think he ought to have voluntarily bestowed. All this, as a natural reaction to the conduct of a penurious parent, sufficiently justifies itself. In Lancelot we have a reminiscence of the clowns of earlier

dramas, but here individualised with a specific life, which shows the advance made by the poet in his art. Salarino and Gratiano are slight characters; but the latter distinctly drawn, so that he may be the worthier to mate with Nerissa, who partakes much of the rationalistic quality of her mistress, and to whom his frivolity will serve as a foil. Besides, the experience he has gained, by the action on him of the incidents in the drama, has necessarily made a graver man of him.

In this drama Shakspere has departed from his usual method of throwing the larger amount of force and importance into the third act. The fourth act here bears the weight of the dramatic crisis, and indeed exhausts the catastrophe of the action. The fifth act has been thought feeble in consequence, and even unnecessary. It may serve to show the fidelity of the poet to his authorities, that this last act, slight as it appears, has its warrant in the original story. The dispute of the ring is to be found in the *Pecorone*, and forms the climax of the tale as it reached Shakspere. The incident was, therefore, not tacked on to the play in order to drag out a fifth act; but the fifth act was added to afford a place for the conclusion of the romance, which conclusion seemed to Shakspere and to Fiorentino quite as needful to its completeness as the incidents of the preceding act. And no doubt it is so, when regarded from a proper point of view. By it the action of the play regains its comic purport, somewhat disturbed by the grave issues dependent on Shylock's strange suit; which incident, indeed, be-

longs to an episode in the play, and not to the main action, which rests with Portia and Bassanio, the lovers who occupy the heroic position in its artistic development, and round whom the other characters, however important, revolve but as satellites and accessories.

It has been already said that Fancy is memory absolved from the order of time, so that it may combine various items of experience, and make them occurrences in relations of time and space, according to the caprices of the will, or for any moral purpose projected by the reason. Excellently and elegantly our poet has exemplified this process in the play we have just analysed; but still more prerogatively in his *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, which we gather was written in his thirty-second year. Tradition, which has preserved so many myths absurdly to the discredit of their subject, is silent as to the occasion on which this masque was composed by Shakspere. Such compositions, for which Ben Jonson was famous, were generally occasional; and this production of Shakspere's fancy appears to have been written, if we may judge from its internal evidence, in honour of the marriage of some noble couple, who are forthshadowed in the persons of Theseus and Hippolyta. Shakspere made noble use of the opportunity; and entering the lists with such poets as Jonson, Beaumont, and Fletcher, all of them eminent for their success in this especial kind of work, has borne off the palm from them and all competitors.

It is in dreams that Fancy exercises the arbitrary

associations already described. Shakspere happily conceived the idea of throwing his subject into the form of a dream, that he might bring into connexion the incongruous materials which he was desirous of using. Faery mythology, Grecian history, English manners, and the adventures of two pairs of lovers whose characters belong to universal nature, unite in one piece, brought and bound together by no law except the absolute will of the poet, and the moral end which served as the final cause of his own working.

In the arrangement of his subject Shakspere starts at once with the marriage of the noble couple, who serve as the motive-spring and exciting occasion by which his Fancy is stimulated to extraordinary effort. This is an exceedingly natural and graceful way of opening his dramatic epithalamium, and secures attention and sympathy from an audience interested in the actual solemnity. With his feelings concerning marriage, such a work as this must have been exceedingly grateful to the poet, and we may esteem it as intended by him to be in honour of the "holy estate" which he has been at so much pains to recommend to the truly noble-minded in so many eloquent sonnets. The nature of the work, too, set him at liberty to indulge in his choice of topics, and his mode of treating them; and accordingly, more or less allegorically, we obtain in this poem numerous and most important glimpses into the inner life of the poet.

How musical are the commencing verses in this

exquisite drama! And even in the complaint of Demetrius the utmost care is bestowed on the diction and movement of the lines. Theseus, in advising Hermia to wed according to her father's will, and so avoid the penalty of death, uses language of great poetic sublimity:

> "Be advised, fair maid:
> To you your father should be as a god;
> One that composed your beauties, yea, and one
> To whom you are but as a form in wax
> By him imprinted, and within his power
> To leave the figure, or disfigure it."

On such topics such is the dignified strain in which Shakspere always writes, with philosophical freedom and without mock-delicacy. He dares to be Nature's mouth-piece, and is of no kin to those who are ashamed of her truths. Equally explicit is Theseus in explaining to the maiden the alternative penalty allowed by the law, in case the sentence of death be remitted:

> "Either to die the death, or to abjure
> For ever the society of men.
> Therefore, fair Hermia, question your desires;
> Know of your youth, examine well your blood:
> Whether, if you yield not to your father's choice,
> You can endure the livery of a nun,
> For aye to be in shady cloister mewed,
> To live a barren sister all your life,
> Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon."

Glorious simplicity of the olden time, when such things could be said without offence to modesty! Here, too, he makes a slight concession to the elder superstition, but immediately recovers it in favour of natural impulse:

"Thrice-blessed they that master so their blood,
To undergo such maiden pilgrimage;
But *earthly happier* is the rose distilled,
Than that which, withering on the virgin thorn,
Grows, lives, and dies in single blessedness."

Still the prominent thought! recurring—still recurring—never to be absent from the mind of the anti-celibate poet. It is with the same simplicity and openness of thought that Hermia replies to the Athenian Duke. Whereupon he gives her time for reflexion, and even takes part against Demetrius, who he has heard had already

"Made love to Nedar's daughter, Helena."

And then considerately withdraws Egeus and Demetrius from the scene, that he may leave the lovers to themselves. How beautiful the colloquy that ensues! replete with immortal lines, inexpedient to quote, for every reader remembers them. And now enters Helena, tenderly reproaching Hermia for having bewitched her Demetrius, and wishing for her rival-friend's attractions. They comfort her by revealing their intention of flying from Athens to-morrow evening, previously appointing a wood beyond the gates as their trysting-place. This purpose poor love-sick Helena fondly betrays to Demetrius, and thus originates the amorous complications which make the interest of the drama.

And now a change comes over the poet's dream, ruled as it is by the tricksy spirit of fancy. The mechanics of Athens have undertaken an important charge, nothing less than to enact a play in honour of their Duke's wedding before him and his lovely

bride. Enter therefore a grotesque group, Bottom the weaver, Snug the joiner, Quince the carpenter, Flute a bellows-mender, Snout a tinker, and Starveling a tailor; Athenian citizens, with English names. Why not? May they not be right translations of their Grecian ones? A grotesque group, indeed! Each man has a separate and disparate character,—for each is a most imperfect specimen of man, and distinctive character represents degrees of individual imperfection,—the particular partial development which marks one man from another. Rich in character, therefore, are these abortions of humanity, and differing from one another as the ass from the emeu, and the ape from the elephant; yet all aiming, like the inferior creatures, to become types of man,—"the paragon of animals." Among these stands prominently forth Bottom the weaver; a soul so comprehensive in its self-esteem, that he would do his own business and every other man's, never doubting his capacity to fulfil any task, however impossible.

But now we get into the open air. We are in the wood near Athens, the trysting-place of Hermia and Lysander. But the faeries are there before us; and Puck, the good-natured, mischievous elf, is full of information concerning the faery king and queen, Oberon and Titania, who have been quarrelling about

> "A lovely boy, stolen from an Indian king:
> She never had so sweet a changeling;
> And jealous Oberon would have the child
> Knight of his train, to trace the forests wild;
> But she perforce withholds the loved boy."

Then enter the faery monarchs, and chafe one an-

other in the most charming words that ever a loving anger was couched in. And now comes out a point in faery theology of the utmost significance. The moods of these great governing powers exert an influence on earthly actions—not on human motives indeed, but on nature's courses. Man is still left free, but nature is fated to obey the caprices of immortal powers. Says Titania:

"Never, since the middle summer's spring,
Met we on hill, in dale, forest, or mead,
By paved fountain or by rushy brook,
Or on the beached margin of the sea,
To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,
But with thy brawls thou hast disturbed our sport.
Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,
As in revenge, have sucked up from the sea
Contagious fogs; which falling in the land,
Have every pelting river made so proud,
That they have overborne their continents:
The ox hath therefore stretched his yoke in vain,
The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn
Hath rotted ere his youth attained a beard;
The fold stands empty in the drowned field,
And crows are fatted with the murrain flock.
The nine men's morris is filled up with mud;
And the quaint mazes on the wanton green,
For lack of tread, are undistinguishable.
The human mortals want their winter here:
No night is now with hymn or carol blest;
Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,
Pale in her anger, washes all the air,
That rheumatic diseases do abound:
And thorough this distemperature we see
The seasons alter: hoary-headed frosts
Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose,
And on old Hyems' chin and icy crown
An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds
Is, as in mockery, set. The spring, the summer,
The chiding autumn, angry winter, change
Their wonted liveries; and the 'mazed world,

> By their increase, now knows not which is which.
> And this same progeny of evils comes
> From our debate, from our dissension;
> We are their parents and original."

The mythology of Homer and Virgil went further than this, and affected the fortunes and conduct of men and women. Nevertheless it touched not the inmost character, and spared the liberty of the will, even while, as among the Grecian dramatists, the hero of the poem was involved in unconscious crime. Something of this too, though in a much milder shape, is attributed by Shakspere to faery operation. The human being is subject to temporary spells and delusions, by which the senses are deceived and error incurred. But there is no permanent result secured. Moreover, from these appliances not even Titania herself is free. Oberon, in his larger knowledge, has means by which even the faery queen may be deluded. The sweet allegory which Shakspere has contrived for this purpose is fortunately referable to his life-experience. The "fair Vestal throned by the west" is an allusion to Queen Elizabeth; "Cupid all armed," another to the Earl of Leicester. In the Kenilworth festivities (1575) a spectacle was introduced which explains the passage:

> "My gentle Puck, come hither: thou rememb'rest
> Since once I sat upon a promontory,
> And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back
> Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath,
> That the rude sea grew civil at her song,
> And certain stars shot madly from their spheres,
> To hear the sea-maid's music."

Among the spectacles exhibited on that occasion was

one of a singing mermaid on a dolphin's back in smooth water, swimming amidst shooting stars. For this description, therefore, Shakspere drew not on his imagination, but his memory. That occurrence was dated just twenty-one years before the composition of this play. Shakspere, therefore, was eleven years old when he was present at those festivities, and observed the spectacle which he has thus described. From this we may observe how early his theatrical education commenced. But we must quote further:

> "That very time I saw (but thou couldst not)
> Flying between the cold moon and the earth,
> Cupid all armed: a certain aim he took
> At a fair Vestal throned by the west,
> And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow,
> As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts:
> But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
> Quenched in the chaste beams of the watery moon,
> And the imperial votaress passed on
> In maiden meditation fancy-free.
> Yet marked I where the bolt of Cupid fell;
> It fell upon a little western flower,
> Before milk-white, now purple with love's wound,
> And maidens call it love-in-idleness."

The little western flower that received the wound intended for "the imperial votaress" was the Countess Lettice of Essex, with whom Leicester had an amour while her husband was absent in Ireland, on his returning from whence he died by poison during the journey. But now the historical reminiscence is lost in the allegory, and the flower becomes the Pansy, which Puck is commanded to pluck for his elfin master:

> "Fetch me that flower; the herb I showed thee once:
> The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid
> Will make or man or woman madly dote
> Upon the next live creature that is seen."

And it is this trick which Oberon plays on the faery queen, to make her dote on Bottom the weaver with the ass's head.

Nothing can better show the manner in which Fancy works, and the arbitrary use which she makes of her materials, turning facts into fables, and re-adjusting them to new occasions with the utmost grace and assurance.

Anon the human interest re-commences. Helena pursues Demetrius in the wood, nor will be shaken off. Wherefore Oberon determines that the pansy-liquor shall be also applied to the sleeping Demetrius, that the maiden may be able to secure the disdainful youth:

> "Take thou some of it, and seek through this grove:
> A sweet Athenian lady is in love
> With a disdainful youth: anoint his eyes;
> But do it when the next thing he espies
> May be the lady. Thou shalt know the man
> By the Athenian garments he hath on.
> Effect it with some care, that he may prove
> More fond on her than she upon her love."

Puck, however, mistakes the man, anointing Lysander's eyes instead, and thus almost hopelessly complicates the dream.

And now others than faeries and lovers are in the wood;—the mechanics rehearsing their play are there. Here we have Bottom in the part of theatrical reader and manager. He has been pondering the drama,

until he conjures up fears for its success, takes exceptions to incidentals, and suggests remedies. Bottom is not only critical, he is inventive. With a little practice and encouragement we shall see him writing a play himself. Indeed, with a trifling exaggeration, the scene is only a caricature of what frequently happened in the Green-rooms of theatres in the poet's own day, and has happened since in that of every other. Here is instinct rashly mistaken for aptitude, and aptitude for knowledge, by the uninstructed artisan, who has to substitute shrewdness for experience. And thus it is with the neophyte actor and the ignorant manager, whose sole aim is to thrust aside the author, and reign independent of his control; altering and supplementing, according to their limited lights, what he has conceived in the fullness of the poetic faculty. Well might Puck say of them, as of these Athenian workmen:

> "What hempen home-spuns have we swaggering here,
> So near the cradle of the faery queen?"

Soon, however, the poor players discover that their manager wears the ass's head, though he never suspects it himself; and even the poor faery queen, the temporarily demented drama, is fain to place herself under his guardianship. She cannot help it, under the circumstances; and, therefore, she gives him all the pretty pickings, the profits, and the perquisites of the theatre, leaving the author scarcely the gleaning. The faeries have charge of the presumptuous ignoramus, with the faery queen's direction:

"Be kind and courteous to this gentleman;
Hop in his walks, and gambol in his eyes;
Feed him with apricocks and dewberries,
With purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries;
Their honey-bags steal from the humble-bees,
And for night-tapers crop their waxen thighs,
And light them at the fiery glow-worm's eyes,
To have my love to bed, and to arise;
And pluck the wings from painted butterflies,
To fan the moonbeams from his sleeping eyes.
Nod to him, elves, and do him courtesies."

In a far different fashion Shakspere conducted matters at his own theatre. There the poet presided; and the world has witnessed the result. The argument implied needs no other elucidation.

The lovers are Oberon's care. He discovers the mistake made by Puck, and the distress occasioned, which immediately he resolves on repairing:

"About the wood go swifter than the wind,
And Helena of Athens look thou find:
All fancy-sick she is, and pale of cheer,
With sighs of love, that cost the fresh blood dear.
By some illusion see thou bring her here:
I'll charm his eyes against she do appear."

But Helena comes not alone, Lysander is with her, still importuning her; and when Demetrius wakes, she has two lovers instead of one pleading for her preference. This confusion amuses Puck:

"Then will two at once woo one;
That must needs be sport alone;
And those things do best please me
That befall preposterously."

The sport is delicious sport; for it is all pure poetry, in which the poet takes the freëst license. It is further complicated by the entrance of Hermia,

and worked up to the ideal pitch of dream-agony, from which there is no relief but waking. But Oberon, like a providence, presides over the visionary affliction, and so orders all, that ere the morrow it shall have a peaceful ending. These events occupy the third act, which according to the Shaksperian plan is the strongest, and closes a cycle of the drama.

The fourth act is brief and simple. Oberon has obtained his purpose, and secured the "changeling child" which he was so ambitious to possess. Time it is, therefore, that he should undeceive Titania; and having re-anointed her eyes, he awakens her, and they are reconciled. In like manner the lovers awake, and pair off according to their likings. They have been roused from sleep by the horn of the hunter, for Theseus, Hippolyta, Egeus, and train are in the woods; and now are on the spot to question the quondam sleepers, and hear the strange story of their several dreamings. Bottom also awakes, and vainly essays to collect his sleep-wanderings. In doing this, he parodies a text of Holy Writ, for which the poet has been accused of profanity. What he meant by it himself was quite the opposite. The quotation is made in a religious spirit, and for the purpose of suggestion. Shakspere thereby intended to imply, that by the "changing" and "translating" of Bottom, he meant to shadow forth the manner in which we shall be transformed in the future life to which we are destined; but to have done this directly would have been undramatic and otherwise objectionable. He therefore does it indirectly, and under a thin veil of

humour, so that while it is there, for the benefit of those who will seek his meaning, it may not be obtruded on the attention of those who are not qualified for its reception. In the same way, in *All's well that ends well*, he puts the description of virginity into the mouth of Parolles, before quoted in his conversation with Helena, which, though true in itself and indeed the moral of the play, he desired to keep half-hidden as an under-current only to be detected by those who are in the secret of such mysteries—the master masons of the craft.

At the beginning of the fifth act, we find Theseus speaking as the poet's expounder, and explaining the process by which such dreams as the one he had been dramatising are produced:

> "Lovers, and madmen, have such seething brains,
> Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
> More than cool reason ever comprehends."

The philosophical reader will do well to consider here the nice propriety with which these two words, "apprehend" and "comprehend" are used. To pass on:

> "The lunatic, the lover, and the poet,
> Are of *imagination* all compact:
> One sees more devils than vast hell can hold;
> That is, the madman: the lover, all as frantic,
> Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt:
> The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
> And as *imagination* bodies forth
> *The forms of things unknown*, the poet's pen
> Turns them to *shapes*, and gives to *airy nothing*
> A local habitation and a name."

For the proper understanding of this all depends on

the sense in which the term Imagination is applied, and also the difference in meaning between the words "forms" and "shapes." The former are ideas, the latter sensations. The "airy nothing" is the prothetic intuition, or what Plato has designated the unity prior to position, which—originating in the procreative faculty, and that highest moral power of the human intelligence which we term conscience or self-knowledge, and which, in reference to the lower intelligence is indeed a Prescience or Foreknowledge —transfers itself as a pure or *à priori* motive to the Will, and thus commences a series of rational and intellectual acts which conduct finally to the projection of a work of imagination. Such intuition in the beginning is an obscure suggestion, a mere vague impulse, which gradually only generates a distinct idea, that powerfully proceeds to assimilate to itself and subordinate to its use such experiences of the mind as are fittest for its purpose, and thus produces in the consciousness such a synthesis of the ideal and the actual as we recognise for an artistic composition. Such is the process described by Shakspere in these philosophical lines, not idly here inserted, but anxiously and of a forethought, in the most fitting place that could be found for them, that the poet might be self-justified both in the conception and execution of his delightful theme. In this exercise of what Wordsworth has since called "the Vision and the Faculty Divine," the poet-eye first directs its glance to heaven, next to earth, and last to heaven again; nor till then may imagination project the forms or ideas of the

work contained in the original intuition, albeit awaiting the full development of what it only suggested, as it may be manifested in a distinct or concrete shape, and then gives to such final shape its appropriate appellation and its proper dwelling, so that it may be identified as a certain picture or poem with a specific title, and referring to a specific time and a specific place, as the date and scene of the argument which has been so elaborately determined and realised. We must expect, therefore, in such a poem, so distinguished by the great poet himself, not only terrestrial references but celestial. In proposing a faery drama, therefore, the poet proposed also a prior purpose—not, as Gervinus appears to think, to popularise the belief of the German races, or to mould it into a better form—but to make it the vehicle of doctrines and ideas which it was his mission, and that of his age, to promulgate. We must regard, therefore, his faery people as emblematical, and not as beings having a correlate objective reality, and of whom it can be predicated that they have intellect and no morality. Nor in the letter of the text, or the dramatic conduct of Puck and Oberon, can we find any sanction for the opinion of the great German critic, that they are incapable of sympathy for human suffering. Titania, in the speech which we have quoted, expresses her regret that their dissensions should influence with such sad fatalities the operations of "human mortals;" and Puck, though he is fond of sport, proves himself deserving the name of Robin Goodfellow by his ascription of gentleness to

the lover, and of prettiness to the sleeping Hermia, as well as by his reflections on man's inconstancy. So far is it from being true that Oberon betrays no compassion for the misfortunes of mortals, that throughout the play he is portrayed as taking the most considerate care of their interests, and solicitously providing in the end a remedy for the inconveniences occasioned by Puck's errors. Moreover, at the end of the play they are brought in to pronounce a blessing on the noble wedded pair and their household. It is, I feel, this human element in Shakspere's fantastic creations which recommends them to our affections, nay, confirms an affinity between them and our better selves. What he really considered them admits of no doubt, since he has told us in Titania's speech above referred to. His theological classical predilections fixed this point for him. Like the Grecian genius and nymph, they are the spirits of nature, the intelligences that are implied in all physical operations and configurations. They are the noumena of all phenomena, and belong to the world of causes and principles. They are also symbols of sacred mysteries such as are hinted at in the Sacred Writings, which contain a mythology, too, as peculiar to the Hebrews, though not generally recognised. Spenser had already led the way in his *Faery Queen*, where such applications of scriptural types abound. That, having communicated such ideas to the faery mythology, Shakspere may therewith have communicated a new life, which has quickened the creations of others, such as Drayton and Ben Jonson, and thus led the way to

a new development of faery fiction, is highly probable. For an idea is essentially a power, creative, generative;—it originates and modifies;—it is productive and regulative;—it renovates and germinates; and re-produces itself in countless forms, passing from mind to mind, like the light from torch to torch, until the intellectual world is thoroughly illuminated with the wisdom of which it is the bearer and the witness. And, like Wisdom, it is not only a power, but immortal, an offspring of eternity.

The *Midsummer-Night's Dream* is especially remarkable for its beauty as a composition. The theme throughout is treated with care as well as felicity. In structure, in diction, in characterisation, and poetical elegance, it is, we may boldly say, faultless. Nor is it less fitted for the stage than for the closet. However it may be acted, whether as a ballet with a favourite cantatrice in the part of Oberon, or otherwise as a Scandinavian legend with the faery monarch properly bearded, its histrionic representation is always charming. Its execution is as exquisite as its conception is delicate.

The faery world is an ideal world in the actual—a second spirit-world, in fact, corresponding to that in man. Yes—there are two spirit-worlds, and unhappy and incomplete is the artist who fails to recognise both. On the one hand, there is the human soul, as the source of *Ideas*, which ideas, only to be gained by self-contemplation, symbolise all that is immortal, spiritual, divine; and on the other, there is the correspondent kingdom of *Laws*, which exist

as it were at the back of natural phenomena, as also under and within them,—supporting and pervading, as spiritual forces, the visible universe. That visible universe we properly call the realm of the apparent, or the actual;—but it is the invisible behind it, and within ourselves, that eminently merits the appellation of the *Real.* Would you paint a true picture of the Real, endeavour to combine these two spirit-worlds—the world of ideas and the world of laws, subordinating altogether the sphere of sensationalism, the ever-vanishing fact of a time-existence, and thus impart to your work that permanence which intrinsically belongs to your subject. Those systems and philosophies therefore which would demonstrate ideas and laws, should enter into the studies of the poet, as they evidently did with Shakspere, and since with Goethe and Schiller. Such studies ought not to be wholly engrossed in the copy or even imitation of material shapes and configurations in nature, or of conventional characters in society, or of the external relations of either. Sublime art is only to be attained by mental enlargement. The enfranchiser of the mind is the Ideal, as manifested in both spirit-worlds. Nor is the Ideal confined to the most elevated strata, it permeates the entire Kosmos. It is no less present to the Beautiful than it is to the Sublime soul. Thus, in a sister-art, we find that Raffaelle was not insensible to the greatness of Michael Angelo, but was wont to aver that he "thanked God, he was born in his days." Moreover, the name of Michael Angelo was the last word pronounced in the Royal Academy

by Sir Joshua Reynolds, another votary of the Beautiful. The Beautiful is the Sublime after a less strict manner,—in a less intense development, that is all. Compare, for an illustration of this point, the *Midsummer-Night's Dream* with *The Tempest.* The Beautiful has more *variety* in the expression, but the idea is the same. Raffaelle never sacrificed conception to treatment, careful as he was of propriety, whether in invention, composition, or expression. Neither has Shakspere, who is nevertheless the Raffaelle or Sophocles of English drama. Beautiful as all these are, they are scarcely less grand or sublime than Michael Angelo, or Æschylus, themselves, as ideal artists.

To attain either Beauty or Sublimity, the Art-Poet must unreluctantly ascend to their source:

> "Mind—mind alone—(bear witness, Heaven and Earth!)
> The Living Fountain in itself contains
> Of Beauteous and Sublime."

He must be willing, like Akenside whom I have just quoted, or Shakspere who is the pervading theme of this entire book, to thread "the dim-discovered tracts of mind"—to soar with Plato or to travel with Humboldt—interpreting the secret of the universe by the oracle of the individual soul. We must know first what belongs to ourselves; what treasures are hidden in the depths of our own being. Self-knowledge is the root of all other knowledge.

CHAPTER III.

The Kenilworth festivities—Shakspere's early associations, and his first steps toward attaining a social position—The "Two Parts of Henry IV."—Sir John Oldcastle—Sir John Falstaff, a special individuality—Its idea—Its basis classical, its final outcome romantic Hotspur—Concealed myths—"Henry V."—Shakspere's estimate of French character—National Individualities.

A DISCOVERY made in the last chapter compels retrospection. Thereby we are carried back to an early period of Shakspere's youth; when, at the Kenilworth festivities, he saw and heard the Mermaid on the Dolphin's back, swimming and singing such strains as unsphered the stars. The boy of eleven was impressed for ever with the vision—which, in the person of Oberon, he describes, when he had himself indeed become the monarch of Faery-land. Other circumstances are connected with the incident by a German writer. We have already alluded to the intercourse of Leicester with the Countess of Essex, whom, after her husband's death in 1576, he married. This intercourse was going on when, at the festivities at Kenilworth, Leicester was entertaining and wooing Elizabeth. Probably the queen discovered the real state of affairs, as she departed suddenly from the gay scene without any known cause. Now, Shakspere on his mother's side was connected with the

family of the Ardens, one of the most considerable and opulent in Warwickshire, and the rival of the Dudleys, when Leicester stood at the height of his power. The feud between the two families was deadly in the person of one individual, Edward Arden, who had gone so far as to remonstrate with Leicester about his intercourse with the countess previous to their marriage. The earl is stated to have resented his interference, and in consequence to have entangled him in a charge of high treason, so that Edward Arden was executed in the year 1583. Shakspere was then in his nineteenth year, and the circumstance was likely to recall the scenes of festivity at which he was a witness eight years before. Whatever doubt, however, may rest on the influence of these events on his outward life, none is possible in regard to their effect on his inward development. The spark, at eleven years of age, had lighted on the altar of the boy's heart, and the enthusiast feeling had been excited, which in after life was destined to such "fine issues." We have, therefore, no reason to wait till a later period and a supposed crime, operating as a necessity, for the motive-impulse wherefore Shakspere visited London, and then, according to the common mistaken notion, accidentally became a player and a poet. No! from his earliest boyhood he was filled with poetic enthusiasm, and his mind brooded on poetic images and poetic themes, the fitting preparatives for his ultimate employment in life. A temperament is indicated in this averse from any such conduct as is attributed to him by vulgar tradi-

tion, and advocated by men who seem to think that they have not remanded genius within the pale of humanity, until they have fixed on it some shameful accusation, and proved it guilty of vice, or even crime. Such is not the way in which the poetic life is trained. Doubtless it takes a path of its own, which to the conventional may appear eccentric; but it is not such a life as requires robust and active exertion in immoral or lawless ways. The boy-poet, on the contrary, is shy, reserved, retiring; and when not gazing on the silent face of nature, or observing with a calm smile the anomalous in the character and conduct of his fellow-men, is engaged with his books, and learning from the example of earlier poets what to imitate, what to avoid, and what to originate from the genial store of his own natural gifts. That Shakspere must have been an earnest student from his earliest days is sufficiently proved by the relative amount of information contained in his earliest work, and the comparative knowledge of art which it implies.

That this information and knowledge was gained in an irregular manner is probable from the alleged fact, that, at the age of fourteen, Shakspere was thrown into the school of adversity, by the decline of his father's fortunes, and the calamity which fell on the family of the Ardens. From the impoverished condition of the two houses, the lad was cast on his own resources, and had so far worked them well that he was enabled to marry, at the age of nineteen, Anne Hathaway, a young woman seven or eight

years older than himself, with adequate experience of life, and such a standing in the world that she was not likely to throw herself away on a profligate youth. She was, in fact, the daughter of a wealthy freeholder in Shottery, near Stratford. As in manhood Shakspere was careful to maintain an habitual correspondence with men of rank and mark, so in boyhood, as by a genial instinct, his relations were with persons of wealth and station. In the circumstance of his marriage we detect no tendency towards low life, but the direct contrary. However poor he might have been, or whatever were his occupation, he sought the society of the rich, and gained so much esteem that he was enabled to win a wife from among them. In that exclusive circle, to which he had providentially obtained admission, he probably secured friends who had both assisted and advised the young married couple, and who, when they found the lady had twins, gave such prudent counsel to Shakspere and his wife, as led to his enterprising journey to London, and her laudable and self-denying stay at Stratford. So far from believing, therefore, in Shakspere's marriage being an unhappy one, I believe it to have been eminently happy, commenced and conducted in prudence, and terminated with satisfaction to both husband and wife. They were living in union and accord at the period of the poet's death; and at no period do we perceive any indication of intended desertion on his part; but the contrary. In the midst of his London employments, Shakspere's thoughts and affections all turned to

Stratford; and the objects which had the strongest hold on them there, we may reasonably believe to have been his wife and children.

And now we have, at the age of thirty-two, the poet of refined imagination and cultivated fancy; the diligent student of history, and a dramatist who in his art had become a master—the greatest in the history of our planet. Now, too, he was about to make such a consummate exhibition of his genius that the world should be startled into attention, and no man doubt that henceforth the poet Shakspere is the teacher for all ages. In the years 1597 and 1598 Shakspere composed the two parts of *Henry IV.* We get here, too, a definite date, so as to be able to record that the second part was completed before the 25th February in the latter year. The success of both parts was unequivocal, and excited so much agitation and delight in the "merrie England" of that day, that a new era of the English stage commences with the fact of their performance.

Curiously enough, owing to accident, these great national and universally interesting plays give proof of Shakspere's strong Protestant feeling. Shakspere trusted to Holinshed, and an old play called *The Famous Victories of Henry V.*, for his materials, and neither Holinshed nor this elder drama is always a reliable authority; hence the poet was involved in a few errors: among them was one in relation to Sir John Oldcastle, whose name he found in the latter as a companion of Prince Henry in his revels, and in the former as a John Oldcastle who was page to the

Duke of Norfolk. This situation we find attributed to Falstaff in the present version of these plays, whose name takes the place of Oldcastle in the original draught. Shakspere, it appears, was not acquainted with the personal identity of Oldcastle, when he gave that name to his fat knight. But the enemies of the Reformation were well aware of it, and that the name belonged to Lord Cobham, who perished as a Lollard and Wickliffite in the persecution of the Church under Henry V. That the heretic nobleman should have been so caricatured by Shakspere was a triumph to the Romanist Mariolater. The poet had never intended to ridicule a Protestant martyr, and instantly corrected the mistake. He even condescended to make an apology for it, in an epilogue, apparently written for no other purpose, to the second part of *Henry IV.* These are the words: "If you be not too much cloyed with fat meat, our humble author will continue the story, with Sir John in it, and make you merry with fair Katharine of France; where, for any thing I know, Falstaff shall die of a sweat, unless already he be killed with your hard opinions; *for Oldcastle died a martyr, and this is not the man.*" In composing his *Henry V.*, however, the poet did not "continue the story *with* Sir John in it." Perhaps he deemed him already killed with the "hard opinions" excited by Romanist animosity; and on that account dropped the subject for the present. However, he placed in Dame Quickly's mouth a description of Falstaff's death, to whom he ascribed a pious end. "Sure," says the loquacious dame, "he's in Arthur's

bosom, if ever man went to Arthur's bosom." Here, too, we have an instance of the facility with which scriptural terms are transferred by the Elizabethan poets to the heroes of romance. They had, in fact, translated the Bible into faery legends, and in its new shape it had still a hold on the popular faith, or rather the popular faith was increased by it.

The influence of his own faery dream was strong upon Shakspere when he commenced working on the tragedy of *Henry IV.* Thus, we have the monarch, in the first scene, contrasting his own apparently profligate young Harry with Harry Percy,—who, under the name of Hotspur, was gaining so much renown,—in these terms :

> " O that it could be proved,
> That *some night-tripping fairy had exchanged*
> *In cradle-clothes our children* where they lay,
> And called mine Percy, his Plantagenet!
> Then would I have his Harry, and he mine."

He had not yet forgotten Titania and her Indian Boy. A correct chronological arrangement of these dramas brings along with it these suggestive links of connexion. Such links, also, serve to prove that the order of their succession has been happily hit.

What cultivation the mind of Shakspere had undergone to enable him to compass such excellence as enraptured the audiences and readers of his own time in the dramas we are now considering! Let us count the steps of the ladder. *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labour's lost*, *Hamlet*, *All's well that ends well*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Henry VI. Part I.*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *Henry VI.*

Parts II. and III., *Richard the Second*, *Richard the Third*, *King John*, *Merchant of Venice*, *and Midsummer-Night's Dream.* Each step an improvement on the preceding, either in the choice of subject, in structure, in knowledge and wisdom, or in poetic fulness. A careful study of these will show the growth of mind and dramatic capacity. In this, we hope that we have assisted the reader, who may have been predisposed to such study. For any other, perhaps, it were in vain to labour: for him, our labour may be fertile in results.

In *Henry IV.* all is manly strength, life, individuality, and characteristic action. The poet has attained to a large freedom of discourse, which permits him to discard some petty artifices for which he had previously shown a fondness. Even in the *Midsummer-Night's Dream* we have a sonnet slyly insinuated into dramatic dialogue for the sake of a certain lyrical effect; but now such aid is no longer to be sought. Good stern blank verse and prose are henceforth sufficient. The poet, like Milton afterwards, quits all meaner instruments for the majestic organ with its mighty stops.

Individuality! We have it in Falstaff, in the height and plenitude of development. Shakspere puts an idea into an old name in the chronicle, and lo! a character which, with its humour, was to enchant the world. This was his way of old,—indeed, from the beginning,—his creative way; and in this very manner will he now give life to the crude materials of an old chronicle and an old play. And he

has so thoroughly made a new thing of it, that he must needs likewise give it a new name; and thus stamp it as an ideal for ever, and not merely an adopted conception from history, more or less accidentally suggested.

And now, what is that idea? Is it of a mere gross fat man with carnal appetites, and wit at command? On this point the following passage will illuminate us:

"*Prince Henry.* Didst thou never see Titan kiss a dish of butter? pitiful-hearted Titan, that melted at the sweet tale of the sun! If thou didst, then behold that compound."

The poet has employed the prince to reveal his secret. Shakspere has not yet lost his classical predilections, but he has learned to turn them more adroitly to account. A Greek might have conceived his Falstaff; but his Titan would have been cast in an heroic mould, not in the familiar shape by which Shakspeare has realised him. On his first presentation, however, the poet runs over with the associations of Greek poetry. "Let us be," says Falstaff, "Diana's foresters, gentlemen of the shade, minions of the moon." And in answer to the old knight's interrogatory, "Is not my hostess of the tavern a most sweet wench?" the prince replies, "As the honey of Hybla, my old lad of the castle."* The standard of character at which the dramatist was aiming still presided;—it is not until he has proceeded far in the portrait, that the modern shape

* This "old lad of the castle" is a remnant of the name of Oldcastle, still inadvertently left standing in the revised text.

ultimately intended comes out in the drawing—perhaps it would be more apt to say, in the colouring. So far from being considered as an uneducated poet, Shakspere must take his place among the most learned poets of the world. His mind was pervaded with examples from Greek and Roman literature, and from the more modern Italian poets, all of them subsisting on classic food and abounding in learned references even when writing in the vulgar tongue, which, by their use of it, they raised from a provincial dialect into a new classic language, flexible, harmonious, and expressively beautiful.

All is life in this finest of historical plays, because all is not mere individuation but individuality. Every scene is replete with positive character. That of Henry IV. is a continuation. Already we have seen and known the man in *Richard II.*;—the man aspiring to power. Now we have the successful usurper, the crowned king. And like a king he deports himself, one of Nature's making,—one who can keep as well as get. His cunning, the prominent trait in his character, is of the true kingly sort, closely allied to wisdom, and consistent with an extensive knowledge of mankind. Like all *parvenu* monarchs, his position compels him to act the dictator; and the people, for their own interests, are fain to submit to such arbitrary but temporary rule. But he wears the office with a smiling grace, and is ever on his guard not to offend. Though a tyrant, he may not be unjust, and his power is for the time identical with that of his country. Her life and wel-

fare are bound up in his; so that *de facto*, if not *de jure*, he must be supported, and his authority maintained.

Of the individuality of Hotspur there can be no doubt. "The hare-brained Hotspur, governed by a spleen," is a decided portrait, strictly defined; but, within its limits, intensely animated and highly coloured. It is altogether a poetical creation; that is, an idea embodied. What a wealth of poetic diction and eloquent language has Shakspere bestowed on the utterances of this headstrong but noble-hearted young man! Truly he is one "made in the prodigality of nature," and "in the essential vesture of creation does bear all excellency." True, brave, and magnanimous, full of vigour, talent, and action; his imagination, nevertheless, outruns his judgment and leads him on to ruin. He has no self-government. A splendid vessel, but with no pilot at the helm, he drives before the storm in glorious trim, but strikes on a rock just at the harbour's mouth. Prince Harry, another highly individualised character, is to gain estimation by his defeat. And thus the two apparently irregularly-minded men are opposed to one another; but the son of Bolingbroke partakes of his father's character, and his inner man is not to be judged of by his outside demeanour. During the period of his seeming profligacy, he is but serving an apprenticeship to the world, in order that he may learn to govern it the better. The dissimulation which he practises, however, is unconscious; for the impulses of youth naturally lead to his extrava-

gances, but an instinctive reflection (if we may be allowed the term) habitually induces him to reason on his position, so that whatever he does or suffers has a final cause, a far distant outlook, and a possible (which becomes an actual) bearing on some ulterior purpose. In fact, Henry is a benevolent genius, who has voluntarily descended from his native sphere and dwelt with inferior natures, not to degrade himself, but to elevate them by his association, and ultimately to benefit them by his acquaintance with their infirmities, which, when he returns to his state, he will, with all due consideration, remember and allow for. This idea lies at the basis of many a myth which devout men hold in reverence, and has indeed a strong interest for serious minds. In romance and drama it has always proved an effective element, and meets us in the elder mythology in many a pleasing shape, as well as in those legends to which we ascribe a more modern date, but which doubtless originated in a pre-historic period.

More individuality yet. Glendower and Douglas are special characters; not sketches, but life-size portraits. The former, with his supernaturalism, serves as a foil to Hotspur, who has no faith in miracles, and loves truth like a rationalist. But in expressing his negative opinions he has little regard to the feelings of others; and therefore deserves the rebuke which he receives from the Earl of Worcester, who in uttering it paints his kinsman's wilful character:

> "You must needs learn, lord, to amend this fault:
> Though sometimes it show greatness, courage, blood,

And that's the dearest grace it renders you,
Yet oftentimes it doth present harsh rage,
Defect of manners, want of government,
Pride, haughtiness, opinion, and disdain;
The least of which haunting a nobleman
Loseth men's hearts, and leaves behind a stain
Upon the beauty of all parts besides,
Beguiling them of commendation."

For the convenience of theatrical arrangements, the great Glendower scene is generally omitted in acting. This should not be; for the play whence it is eliminated is perfect in structure, style, diction, and its complete finish in all three; so that there is in it nothing superfluous, nothing unprepared, and not a line that has not a specific bearing on the spirit, meaning, and scope of the entire composition. In all these respects it is greater than any of Shakspere's previous works, and a greater marvel than any of the wonders that announced the birth of Glendower.

As usual, Shakspere, in this play, brings his action to a climax in the third act. Here the long-looked-for explanation between Prince Henry and his father takes place, and that glorious speech of the former, so full of mystical meaning, which assures the king that his son will far more than equal the redoubted Hotspur:

"I will *redeem* all this on Percy's head,
And in the closing of some *glorious* day
Be bold to tell you that I am your son;
When I *will wear a garment all of blood,*
And stain my favour in a bloody mask,
Which, washed away, shall scour my shame with it:
And that shall be the day, whene'er it lights,
That this same child of honour and renown,
This gallant Hotspur, this all-praised knight,

And your unthought-of Harry chance to meet.
For every honour sitting on his helm,
Would they were multitudes, and on my head
My shames redoubled! for the time will come,
That I shall make this *northern* youth exchange
His *glorious* deeds for my indignities.
Percy is but my factor, good my lord,
To engross up *glorious* deeds on my behalf;
And I will call him to so strict account,
That he shall render every *glory* up,
Yea, even the slightest *worship* of his time,
Or I will tear the reckoning from his heart."

Full of suggestion are these magnificent lines; and their mythological references obvious. An elder but evil and oppressive dynasty has finally to be superseded by a wiser and more charitable rule. On the part of the former are superstition and infidelity, those usual correlatives in a corrupt church; and on the latter a recognition of the flesh and its rights, but no admission to the honours of the state, which are henceforth reserved for intellect and morality. This is the history of nations—of the world—of the universe. Shakspere had a keen perception of these inner analogies and their spiritual application; a point in his writings not to be overlooked by those who would be thoroughly acquainted with the more abstract qualities of his marvellous genius.

But while thus alluding incidentally to the symbols which, in common with other poets of his time, Shakspere was in the habit of connecting with his poetry, and under which a secret meaning was veiled; the great poet was especially careful to preserve the humanities of his theme: and therefore King Henry IV. stands before us in his historical lineaments only,

with a doubtful title. His faults are all detailed by Hotspur in his answer to Sir Walter Blunt. He points them out historically one by one as they were realised in acts. And it is historically only that his character can be judged of; for in great part it is shaped out of the circumstances of the time. His adaptation to those circumstances constitutes his claim to respect. But that there was a political necessity for his existence in the exact position that he occupied, is the only apology for his conduct. This apology Shakspere states in the strongest manner, thereby arguing in favour of the new era which commenced with the fall of Richard II., and justifying at once his hero and the course of Providence. In doing this, Shakspere is in advance of the chroniclers, who represent the troubles of his reign as divine punishments sent on the realm for its treatment of a murdered king; whereas Shakspere treats them as natural results, originating in individual character and human action. It is thus that Shakspere mounts on the wings of philosophy above the miry level of superstition, and escapes the pollution which must needs adhere to spirits incapable of a lofty flight. In this manner his dramas assume an ethical interest, and rise into the sphere of moral teaching. It is no longer a chronicle-play which we are considering, but an historical poem, displaying to the height both comic and tragic power.

The *Second Part of Henry IV.* continues the mighty theme. Hotspur is indeed slain; but great spirits yet survive. Falstaff remains; and, seduced

by the popularity which the character had secured, the poet ventures on a still larger development of the comic element and its hero's peculiarities. We have already said that this drama has an epilogue; it is also graced with a prologue, or "Induction" as it is called. It is placed in the mouth of "Rumour," to certify the audience that false news has been circulated respecting the "royal field of Shrewsbury." To this effect:

> "that Harry Monmouth fell
> Under the wrath of noble Hotspur's sword;
> And that the king before the Douglas' rage
> Stooped his anointed head as low as death."

Such is the news, in fact, brought to the Earl of Northumberland by Lord Bardolph. Anon, the retainers Travers and Morton bring truer information; and also, that the victorious king had dispatched a power to encounter the earl, under the conduct of Prince John of Lancaster and the Earl of Westmoreland. In the next scene Falstaff reappears,—with the new gloss of his military reputation upon him, as the supposed vanquisher of Hotspur. His improved circumstances now allow him a smart page to bear his sword and buckler, with whom his first colloquy is held. The prince himself had placed the boy in the service of the fat knight, who suspects a trick in it. But the trick, assuredly, was a benevolent one—to provide him with a respectable companion, and the appearance of a more decent state. The Lord Chief-Justice who tried him for the Gadshill robbery begins to take an interest in his apparently rising fortunes, and gives him good advice. But we

can see that the carnal rogue is incorrigible, and with all his wit has not wit enough to follow wise counsel. This perversity is attributed to Falstaff, to prepare for and to justify the prince's subsequent conduct toward him. All the pains he had taken to effect his reformation had proved vain; for the old rake was not susceptible of improvement, and was therefore of necessity subsequently discarded. We have then a council of the rebellious conspirators, who propose in their next ventures against the king to avoid the imprudence which had proved so fatal at Shrewsbury. And so the first act, of which this is all the business, simply initiates the argument.

The second act opens with a Falstaff scene. The Hostess Quickly has determined on arresting the fat knight, who is indebted to her a hundred marks. He is relieved by the entrance of the Lord Chief-Justice, who rebukes him for having outstaid his furlough. The transaction draws out the character of Mrs. Quickly, and presents us with a rich Shaksperian portrait—that of a kind-hearted, vulgar woman, with an undisciplined tongue and an empty head. We have next Prince Henry in easy conversation with Poins, and abounding in wit that rivals Falstaff's own. But he likewise reasons admirably, and shows clearly that the time has come for escaping from such companions, now that the practical business of life is likely to press him hard. His father is sick; and ere long he will have to assume a more majestic shape. His mind is in a state of preparation for the important change. For the present, however, he is

content with moralising on his position. "Well, thus we play the fools with the time, and the spirits of the wise sit in the clouds, and mock us." And he is about to play the fool, and surprise Falstaff at supper at the Boar's Head with Dame Quickly and Doll Tear-sheet—[the latter name, Coleridge remarks, and no doubt rightly, should have been printed Tear-street*]. The scene is intentionally gross; for the design is to exhibit the depth of Falstaff's degradation, and Shakspere no more than Hogarth shrunk from uncomfortable facts that served for the rough shell of a moral. His genius was of too robust a character to indulge a fastidious muse. Like nature, it could be stern as well as gentle.

The entire act is a diversion. The serious business of the drama recommences in the third act. Here we have the king somewhat convalescent, but troubled with sleeplessness and anxious cares, moralising on the necessity of events and on the valour by which it is to be met. The scene suddenly changes to Gloucestershire, and we are then introduced to Justice Shallow, and his following,—a number of capital portraits all set in one frame. In the fourth act the comic element is again subordinated, and the historical personages occupy the scene—the Archbishop of York, the Lords Mowbray and Hastings, and the Earl of Westmoreland, the latter rebuking the rebels in eloquent terms, that clearly bring before us the whole political relations of things and

* "This Doll Tear-*street*," says the prince, "should be some *road*." It is equivalent to our modern "street-walker."

persons. Shortly we are introduced to Prince John of Lancaster, whose wily dealing with the rebels is a piece of king-craft only to be justified by the need; but, inasmuch as it apparently avoids the shedding of blood in civil war, is perhaps justified by a merciful motive. The condition of the country is abnormal, and as such aptly described in the following picturesque lines:

> "So that this land, like an offensive wife
> That hath enraged her man to offer strokes,
> As he is striking, holds his infant up,
> And hangs resolved correction in the arm
> That was upreared to execution."

The act ends with that beautiful scene, in which Prince Henry takes the crown while his father is sleeping—and being rebuked, renders such atonement as makes not only his dying father but every one of us love him. The reader will perceive that here he meets with the same construction as in *The Merchant of Venice*, the weight of the action being thrown into the fourth act.

The fifth act is supplemental, and treats of the moral issues of the mighty events which have preceded. The story of Falstaff is pursued to his final degradation. The fat knight has planted himself on Justice Shallow; and, finding the task of overreaching him easy, has no conscience to prevent or to persuade him from benefiting by the opportunity. To make a dupe of the country magistrate is to him a mere jest, at which he is persuaded that Prince Henry will laugh quite as much as himself. But he is mistaken. The king having died, his successor is no longer a

fitting companion for so uncleanly a liver, nor he for the new king. All attempts at reforming him have failed. With more opportunity, he would necessarily prove guilty of more corruption, and may not therefore even be recognised by a monarch. The office of Henry of itself places a distance between them, and this gulf is now increased by moral considerations equally imperative. Nevertheless, the poet is careful to preserve the æsthetic proportions of his fallen hero. In comparison with such men as Shallow, Silence, and Bardolph, Falstaff appears a prodigy of merit, a being dropped from another sphere. The dramatic art thus exercised by the poet is of the highest quality, and an instance of his perfect mastery over his theme and its treatment. The contrast is effected by depriving them of all intellectual as of moral excellence. The Justice is no better than his serving-man, and his serving-man only a corrupt knave, who misuses his master's patronage. Nor has Shakspere left this doubtful; he has made Falstaff moralise on the fact. "If," said he, "I were sawed into quantities, I should make four dozen of such bearded hermit's staves as Master Shallow. It is a wonderful thing to see the semblable coherence of his men's spirits and his; they, by observing him, do bear themselves like foolish justices; he, by conversing with them, is turned into a justice-like serving-man. Their spirits are so married in conjunction with the participation of society, that they flock together in consent, like so many wild-geese."

It is to be suspected that the old man deluded himself with the notion that, by like "participation," Prince Hal had been reduced to similar "semblable coherence:" but there was an innate royalty in the heir to the throne which preserved him from defilement, whatever might be the contact to which he consented while prosecuting for himself his early education in the great school of the world, with all its vices and all its perils. He has come clear out of the ordeal; and now appears in his majesty, which, once put on, he resolves never to sully, as Henry V., —the future victor at Agincourt.

This great event forms the subject of his next tragedy, *King Henry V.* This work Shakspere accompanied with a Chorus, who is careful to announce the greatness of its argument as well as to explain its subject. The proximate date of the performance is suggested by the allusion of the chorus in the fifth act to the Earl of Essex's military expedition to Ireland;—that is between the April and October of 1599. The drama aims at a severe and stately epic style, and avoids theatrical expression as much as possible. We are now to behold Henry V. in his royal, that is his true character. It is thus described by the Archbishop of Canterbury:

> "The breath no sooner left his father's body,
> But that his wildness, mortified in him,
> Seemed to die too; yea, at that very moment,
> Consideration, like an angel, came,
> And whipped the offending Adam out of him,
> Leaving his body as a paradise,
> To envelop and contain celestial spirits."

The new king is the topic of astonishment to statesmen and scholars. He is now as careful of conventionalities as he had formerly been careless. He consults the archbishop as to his right before he ventures on the war with France, and throws on his grace's conscience the burden of the proof. In the scene devoted to this purpose, we have reasons of state patiently divulged, without any reference to an audience whose approbation is never once conciliated. In this earnest and sincere writing, the poet shows himself absorbed in his subject with a perfect faith, not aiming at popularity but truth. We cannot but admire the greatness of soul implied in such a mode of dealing with his theme. How steadily the eagle moves, as he soars to "the highest heaven of invention"!

The chorus of which we have spoken serves to explain some connecting links of the action which want of room compels to be relegated to the background. In this way we are told that three noblemen have been bribed by France to assassinate the English monarch. Yet the act does not open with this business, but with the comic underplot, that we may learn how that the braggart Pistol has married Dame Quickly, and thus becomes mine host of the tavern in Eastcheap. The poet is careful to trace the progress of life in these humble characters, and clearly loves the subject. Nay, he loves *them* too, with all their faults. An eminent German critic somewhat rashly pronounces that the intention of the dramatist was here ethical, not æsthetic. No

greater error can be committed. True, he traces their social degradation; but this because the law of their position and their individuality led inevitably to downward results. But not, therefore, does he lose interest in them, or discard them. He still has a Creator's affection for them, and in their decline still accompanies them with his supporting providence. In a word,

> "He views with equal eye, as God of all,
> A hero perish, or a sparrow fall."

Even these poor people, however, have one redeeming quality—their patriotism is indubitable. They go to the wars, with other ranks of society, and the one purpose puts them all on the same level. War recognises no narrow moralities;—it destroys, indeed, the mural limits of convention, and lays the field open for the fair trial of our common humanity. King Henry states the principle distinctly:

> "There is no king, be his cause never so spotless, if it come to the arbitrement of swords, can try it out with all unspotted soldiers. Some, peradventure, have on them the guilt of premeditated and contrived murder; some, of beguiling virgins with the broken seals of perjury; some, making the wars their bulwark, that have before gored the gentle bosom of peace with pillage and robbery."

Be it so; but to all these their common patriotism is their piety, and the wings of religious charity shall cover their sins alike. The meanest shall rank with the noblest—all brought within the same magic circle of redemption, whether ultimately saved or no. Bardolph and Pistol are punishable for their delinquencies notwithstanding. So likewise are Richard Earl of Cambridge, Henry Lord Scroop of Marsham.

and Sir Thomas Grey—whose guilt is as the unpardonable sin, offending against the spirit of patriotism itself—but who, dying repentant, die in hope. Not such the transgression of their humbler countrymen, always within the range of forgiveness. The law may demand their bodies;—but Heaven has "mercy on their souls." And to that Heaven their patriotism shall plead for more than compassion—for recompense. Such is the creed of the National Poet.

I take leave here, also, to correct another error of the German critic, who objects that Shakspere's patriotism is narrow, prejudiced, and unphilosophical. Here he would place bounds to the far-reaching mind of the most catholic of thinkers. In the critic's opinion, the greatness of Henry V. as a dramatic hero would appear still more estimable, if his enemies had been depicted by Shakspere as less inestimable. He then adds: "It alone belonged to the ancients to honour even their enemies. Homer knows no depreciation of the Trojans, and Æschylus no contempt of the Persians, even when he delineates their impiety and rebukes it. In this there lies a large-hearted equality of estimation and nobility of mind, far surpassing in practical morality many subtle Christian theories of brotherly love. That Shakspere distorts the French antagonists, and could not even get rid of his Virgil-taught hatred against the Greeks, is one of the few traits which we would rather not see in his works: it is a national narrow-mindedness, with which the Briton gained ground over the man. The nations of antiquity, who bore a far stronger stamp of na-

tionality than any modern people, were strangers to this intolerant national pride. Even the Romans were so. On their triumphal arches they fashioned the statues of captive barbarian monarchs, noble in outward form, and showing in their whole bearing all the hostile defiance of independence."

This is far too strongly urged, and pursues theory farther than facts will warrant. Shakspere in this play was not ignorant of the wise counsel given by Socrates to Alcibiades. He had read the dialogue of Plato, and remembered it during the composition of his tragedy. It is true that he has put the sage's advice into the mouth of the French, but this only shows the more that he was desirous of doing justice to them. Says the Dauphin, after the philosopher:

> "In cases of defence 'tis best to weigh
> The enemy more mighty than he seems:
> So the proportions of defence are filled;
> Which, of a weak and niggardly projection,
> Doth, like a miser, spoil his coat with scanting
> A little cloth."

The French King corroborates this showing in the following magnificent lines:

> "Think we King Harry strong;
> And, princes, look, you strongly arm to meet him.
> The kindred of him hath been fleshed upon us;
> And he is bred out of that bloody strain
> That haunted us in our familiar paths:
> Witness our too-much memorable shame
> When Cressy battle fatally was struck,
> And all our princes captived by the hand
> Of that black name, Edward black prince of Wales;
> Whilst that his mighty sire, on mountain standing,
> Up in the air, crowned with the golden sun,
> Saw his heroical seed, and smiled to see him,

> Mangle the work of nature, and deface
> The patterns that by God, and by French fathers,
> Had twenty years been made. This is a stem
> Of that victorious stock; and let us fear
> The native mightiness and fate of him."

Shakspere, therefore, was not ignorant of the philosophical precept, nor did he ignore it, but ennobled his country's enemies by placing it among their beliefs. But he could not ignore his country's chronicles, which stated that the practice and the theory of the French leaders did not exactly accord. The fact is, that Shakspere has not willingly deteriorated the French character; but was prevented by history from ascribing to it the virtues that the ancients recognised in the Trojans and the Persians. There are defects in that character which it infers no narrow-minded national prejudice for an Englishman to point out. Nor can it be said that Shakspere has exaggerated those foibles. He has, in fact, dealt with them gravely, as a philosopher and a poet. They, moreover, enter into the scope and spirit of the trilogy, which is concerned in all its three parts in the development of individualities. And here he gives us, in addition to the personal individualities of the dramatic characterisation, the national individualities of the historical record. All is in the spirit of the plan on which the drama was projected—that of grouping together a number of individuals, each character strongly marked; and national individuality naturally came within the scope and aim of such a design. All is in beautiful harmony—there is no prejudice; but the integrity of the purpose is carefully preserved in

the whole as in the parts, and an orb-like roundness preserved to insure the perfection of both.

In the structure of this drama, as in *The Merchant of Venice*, and in another play or two, the climax is thrown on the fourth act, instead of, as usual, on the third. The fifth act is apparently supplementary, yet indispensable in order to complete the subject. The seeming irregularity has a justifying cause, and arises not out of any incapacity in the poet, but from the nature of his theme.

During the period that we have traced in this part of our general argument, and which extends from 1591 to 1599, Shakspere's reputation was greatly increased. He had also succeeded in obtaining the much-wished-for Grant of Arms from Dethick the Garter King of Arms, who conceded the application in 1597. In the same year, also, *Romeo and Juliet*, *King Richard II.*, and *King Richard III.*, were printed and published. *The First Part of Henry IV.* was also entered at Stationers' Hall. These facts indicate the revival of literary activity, in consequence of recent successes.

But with this period a more important occurrence is connected; Shakspere's purchase of that "place of lordship in the country" which so offended "Ratseis Ghost." The fact is registered in the following words:

"At the term of Easter, in the 39th year of Elizabeth," &c. *i.e.* 1597, by "a plea of covenant" between

"William Shakspere, *gentleman*," and "William Underhill, gentleman," the former became possessed of "one messuage, two barns, two gardens, and two orchards, with appurtenances, in Stratford-upon-Avon," and for this he gave "to the aforesaid William (Underhill) sixty pounds sterling." The house on this property had been built by Sir Hugh Clopton, in the reign of Henry VII., and was called "the great house." Shakspere called it "New Place," and it became his residence.

And now it is that the Poet, having conquered a position, has his name registered in Meres' *Palladis Tamia;* and, as we have already stated, it begins to appear on the title-pages of his own published plays, and, we may add, on the title-pages of others, which the publishers would have palmed on him, if they could. Shakspere was now, in fact, a man of distinction in the world of property, as well as a legalised gentleman. He was in a position to be courted for his influence and patronage. Thus we have a letter on 24th January 1597-8, written by Abraham Sturley from Stratford to his brother-in-law, Mr. Richard Quiney,* then in London, soliciting Lord Treasurer Burleigh on behalf of the town of Stratford, for exemption from subsidies and taxes, as well as for a grant of a portion of 36,000*l.* set aside by parliament for the relief of decayed cities and towns, in consideration of two serious fires that had raged in Stratford—

* He was the father of Thomas Quiney, who subsequently married Shakspere's youngest daughter.

from which New Place had narrowly escaped—in the years 1594 and 95. "It seemeth," says the letter-writer, "that our countriman Mr. Shakespere is willing to disburse some monei upon some od yarde land or other at Shottre, or near about us. He thinketh it a very fit patterne to move him to deal in the matter of our tithes. Bi the instructions u can geve him thearof and bi the frindes he can make thearfore, we think it a fair mark for him to shoot at, and not impossible to hitt. It obtained, would advance him indeede, and would do us much goode."

Shakspere was now a "gentleman"—with "a place of lordship in the country," at Shottery;—the locality renewing his early associations, and especially those connected with Anne Hathaway, whom there he had wooed and won. This fact has been justly claimed as irrefragable evidence of his matrimonial felicity. In the month of February in the same year 1598, we have further proof of his personal prosperity. In an Inventory of corn and malt in "Stratforde Borroughe Warwick," taken in apprehension of a scarcity, William Shakspere is entered as possessing ten quarters, being the third largest holder in his ward; the other two having, respectively, seventeen and a half, and eleven quarters.

As it is customary to cast a dark shadow over the relations between Ben Jonson and Shakspere, it is pleasant to find that this year, 1598, throws a little light on the picture. An amended copy of sturdy Ben's *Every Man in his Humour* was then performed

at Blackfriars' Theatre, having been two years previously played at The Green Curtain. It was at Shakspere's suggestion, and at his interposition, that this excellent comedy had been transferred from one stage to the other. In the list of the principal comedians who played in the piece, Shakspere's name occupies the head place, and he is supposed to have acted the character of Old Knowell. Victor Hugo, in alluding to this fact, incautiously writes thus:—"Shakspere had permanently near him one envious person, Ben Jonson, *an indifferent comic poet*, whose *début* he assisted." This is not the only thing that has annoyed me in this great Frenchman's in many respects estimable book, wherein the most offensive traditional matter is produced in company with ascertained facts, thus making a composite portrait, the glaring inconsistencies of which are not to be explained on any decent psychological theory. As for Ben Jonson, William Gifford has sufficiently taken care of his fame; and it is surprising that Victor Hugo had not consulted his pages before recording so injurious a verdict against a man whom his hero was proud to call his friend, and who wrote those immortal verses, which contain the noblest recognition of Shakspere's merits that the memory of the bard has ever received.

"Looke how the father's face
Lives in his issue; even so the race
Of Shakspere's minde and manners brightly shines
In his well-torned and true-filed lines:

In each of which he seemes to shake a lance
As brandish't at the eyes of Ignorance!
Sweet Swan of Avon! what a sight it were,
To see thee in our waters yet appeare,
And make those flights upon the bankes of Thames
That so did take Eliza and our James!
But stay, I see thee in the Hemisphere
Advanced, and made a Constellation there.
Shine forth, thou Starre of Poets, and with rage
Or influence chide or cheere the drooping Stage;
Which, since thy light from hence, hath mourned like night,
And despaires day, but for thy Volumes' light."

PART III.

COMIC PERIOD.

1599-1601.

CHAPTER I.

Shakspere's comic tendencies—"Much Ado about Nothing"—His comic creations—Beatrice and Benedick, improved on Biron and Rosalind—Hero—Shakspere's lighter pieces, to be properly appreciated, must be viewed from a high elevation—"As you like it"—Shakspere's fools—"Merry Wives of Windsor"—"Twelfth Night"—Universal character—Shakspere's anticipation of philosophical discoveries.

THE tendency of Shakspere towards comedy has been decidedly apparent even in his more serious pieces, and for a while the great poet now indulged it almost exclusively. It was, indeed, the natural outcome of his inward experience and artistic development. His passion was now to individualise, and comedy affords opportunity for its display. With all the energy of his soul, therefore, he threw himself into the arms of Thalia, and, that she might effectually dry up her tears, submitted to her caprices. He revelled in her society, and surrendered his entire being to the influence of her charms. The two years which he thus employed must have been among the happiest of his life.

Much Ado about Nothing appears to have been commenced soon after *Henry V.* Shakspere apparently derived the subject from a novel of Bandello's. The story itself had, of course, an elder origin. It is to

be found in the fifth canto of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, the argument of which had already been treated in a play under the title of *Ariodante and Ginevra*. The episode from Ariosto had been more than once translated into English; and Spenser in his *Faerie Queen* made use of it in the second canto. Belleforest, in 1583, included it in his *Cent Histoires Tragiques*, a translation of which into English was soon afterwards made. As usual, in adopting the subject, Shakspere commenced by engrafting on it an idea. He did more, for he expanded it, adding to the tale of Claudio and Hero that of Beatrice and Benedick, which latter has ultimately commanded the greater interest. These characters are the poet's own creations, as are also Dogberry and Verges. In the incidents of the original tale itself he has in like manner introduced variations, in subservience to dramatic convenience; variations which are sometimes needful in translating a story from one art into another. Each has its limitations. What is proper for a poem will not always come into a painting; what is available in a romance will not always suit the epos; and what suits the epos must sometimes be discarded from the drama. The structure of each controls the choice of the materials. Dramas, in particular, from the necessities of the stage, are inevitably cast in a mould, and have so far an external form imposed on them which will not admit of certain particulars, or at all events will throw them into the background, though in the original fable they may have occupied a prominent place. In the comedy before us, the original fable

itself retires into a secondary position, while an invented action takes the front rank.

In drawing the characters of Beatrice and Benedick, Shakspere improved on a younger conception. Biron and Rosalind, in *Love's Labour's lost*, form the earliest sketches of these more complete portraits. On *those* "he tried his 'prentice-hand,"—*these* exhibit the master touches. They are indeed finished and exquisite works of art, by one who had now nothing to learn, but had grown to be as perfect in execution as he was excellent in conception.

The plot in which this invented action is embodied grows out of the characters themselves, and apart from the characters is really "nothing," notwithstanding the "much-ado" that is made "about" it. Two couples are to be brought into marriage relations, and these are to be disturbed by the misdoings of the Bastard John, whose errors lie in the malignity of his own nature and have no external motive. One such man troubles the whole circle whereof he is a living segment. That circle presents a family enjoying supreme felicity, and indulging in a merry vein; but one man's evil disposition suddenly subverts its happiness, and threatens it with a tragic crisis. The mirth with which the play commences is as general as it is generous, and we behold life in holiday vestments disporting as at a festival which was destined never to be discontinued. But the change comes—and the gay become grave, the witty and the loving become revengeful, and the most amiable assume an aspect of sternness only

proper to offended honour. Calumniated innocence has to be vindicated, and death frowns on noble brows, and steps ireful between dearest friends. Honourable as they are, they are fortune's fools, and require discipline to make them more earnest and sincere in their engagements and duties. Seriousness has to be forced upon them; and this purpose effected, again begins for them a serene life, in which mirth is chastened by reflection.

In the development of the relations thus established some inferior agencies assist. Over them is extended the same bland colouring. The State in which this family flourishes is carelessly governed; authority slumbers, and public offices are negligently executed. Dogberry and Verges, men utterly unfit for their situation, are on a familiar footing with the governor, who, however, never suspects their unfitness, until the crisis arrives which constitutes the turning-point of the action. These characters form the low-comedy of the drama; and, "shallow fools" as they are, bring to light what profounder wisdom could not discover. This is a religious lesson, and Shakspere dwells on it emphatically. The catastrophe of the play is scarcely of a less sacred character, though classical in form. The restored Hero is brought to the reformed Claudio, like Alcestis to her husband Admetus, under another name, and concealed behind a veil which disguises her identity. The incident is beautiful both in the Grecian drama and the English play; and furnishes a tableau which, whether in sculpture or in painting, produces an exquisite picture:

"*Claudio.* Give me your hand before this holy friar:
I am your husband, if you like of me.
Hero. And when I lived, I was your other wife;
[*Unmasking.*
And when you loved, you were my other husband.
Claudio. Another Hero?
Hero. Nothing certainer.
One Hero died belied; but I do live,
And, surely as I live, I am a maid."

Loving, faithful, forgiving Hero! Equally delicate the creations both of Shakspere and Euripides—both the affianced bride and the devoted wife; each touching in its pathos, both consecrated by our tears.

Nothing is more difficult than such a fine creation in which retired modesty is to be portrayed. The characterisation is almost negative, consisting in the absence of those points by which other individualities are defined. While Beatrice talks and rattles away, Hero is silent. She is so, save in one sentence, throughout the first scene. We are scarcely aware of her having been present, until Claudio speaks of her to Benedick, who is evidently puzzled to appreciate an excellence that is simply expressed by a pure negation. We meet with her again in the first scene of the second act; and again her conversation is limited to a single sentence. It is not until Pedro as a masker addresses her, that she ventures on more, and then but little. Wooed and won for Claudio, she seems to think, like him, that "silence is the perfectest herald of joy;"—for we hear her say nothing; only Claudio confesses that she has whispered "in his ear, that he is in her heart." Reticence like this in the drawing of character is the perfection of Art. In the whole

scene she merely utters another sentence, wherein she assents to the plot to make Benedick and Beatrice love one another. "I will," she says, "do any modest office, my lord, to help my cousin to a good husband." She has just been made happy herself, and will help in making her cousin so. A French playwright would have made her dilate on modesty and delicacy, and demonstrated the refinement of her mind by theorising on the subject. Her part would have been so many lengths at least, to make it worth the while of a leading actress to undertake its impersonation. Shakspere keeps her on the stage, to say as it were nothing. This is just the difference between the playwright and the dramatist.

At length, Hero ceases to play a merely negative part, and comes out in a positive individuality. The third act opens with the practice on Beatrice, in which the gentle Hero takes the lead. She is no longer silent, but discourses eloquent music of "the pleached bower, where honeysuckles, ripened by the sun, forbid the sun to enter; like favourites, made proud by princes, that advance their pride against the power that bred it;" and also of "little Cupid's crafty arrow, that only wounds by hearsay." She likens Beatrice to "a lapwing, that runs close to the ground;" and declares "her spirits are as coy and wild as haggards of the rock." See, what poetry was wrapt up in this hitherto silent woman; what beauty was hidden in her enshrining reticence. In what rich diction does she describe Beatrice, and her waywardness:

> "Nature never framed a woman's heart
> Of prouder stuff than that of Beatrice;
> Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes,
> Misprising what they look on; and her wit
> Values itself so highly, that to her
> All matter else seems weak. She cannot love,
> Nor take no shape nor project of affection,
> She is so self-endeared."

So one rich nature appreciates another; the richer the one that so appreciates. "Speech is silvern, but silence is golden;"—and this golden gift is Hero's by nature. She even exceeds Beatrice in the extravagance of her wit, when once her fancy is stimulated, and grows in the audacity of her determination, when thoroughly engaged in action. She will even "devise some honest slander, to stain her cousin with." O Hero! "*honest* slander." She is skilful in the use of such adjectives, which are so to qualify as to alter the very nature of the substantive noun. "*Honest* slander"—"*modest* office"—O, fie! But thus it is with timid natures; when once emboldened, they grow overbold. We meet with the same excitement in her while discoursing of the marriage-tires;—she becomes saucy. "My cousin's a fool, and thou art another. I'll wear none but this." But as "pride comes before a fall," so are "the pegs that make this music to be let down."

Poor Hero has to bear repudiation before the hymeneal altar itself. Claudio, a like reticent nature with Hero, when once roused, runs into extremes. Nothing but this over-demonstrant mode of extricating himself from an injurious alliance will suit his violated feeling; and he commits a great outrage on

public decency, and a painful sacrilege to a holy place, rather than not violently express his indignation. He is all the more violent now, because of his previous reserve.

> "I never tempted her with word too large;
> But, as a brother to his sister, showed
> Bashful sincerity and comely love.
> *Hero.* And *seemed* I ever otherwise to you?
> *Claud.* Out on thy *seeming!* I will write against it:
> You seem to me as Dian in her orb,
> As chaste as is the bud ere it be blown;
> But you are more intemperate in your blood
> Than Venus, or those pampered animals
> That rage in savage sensuality."

Alas for Hero! What real *seeming* there was in Hero, and what the nature of that seeming, some little of what we have remarked above may indicate. The ice on the volcano belied the fire within. And now that fire is still more repressed by a colder atmosphere, which, with more intense frigidity, inwardly binds-in the heat, so that it must needs consume the life that it ought to supply.

> "These things, come thus to light,
> *Smother her spirits up.*"

She swoons into a sleep, like death. And that it is not death is miracle. "Do not live, Hero," exclaims her father—

> "Do not ope thine eyes;
> For, did I think thou wouldst not quickly die,
> Thought I thy spirits were stronger than thy shames,
> Myself would, on the hazard of reproaches,
> Strike at thy life."

Such being the characters of Claudio and Hero, the poet yielded only to a dramatic necessity in por-

traying those of Beatrice and Benedick. They come forth from the canvas naturally by the law of contrast; a principle so important to effective dramatic composition. Beatrice and Benedick must be over-demonstrative to make the reticence of Claudio and Hero more apparent. But in the main point they are alike; for the poet's aim is to show similarity in diversity, as well as particular difference in general likeness. In them, too, the outward conceals the inward; the apparent, the real. Boastful of their freedom from passion, their very wit itself, with its badinage and sometimes its bitterness, is even the direct utterance and expression of their secretly passionate natures. They love one another from the beginning, but a cautious pride prevents a too-early disclosure, and the mental reservation produces an impatience of temper which breaks forth in humorous sallies. The smoke betrays the fire.

In one respect these lighter pieces of Shakspere are superior to his tragic dramas. They have to be viewed from a higher elevation than the level they seem to occupy. The propriety of the action and the harmony of the parts are not otherwise to be perceived. There is a subtlety and delicacy of delineation which severer pieces cannot exhibit. We have referred to the central idea which pervades the action of the play, and also to the law by which the characters are distinguished. To this idea and this law every thing is subordinated; and by them all seeming anomalies may be explained and reconciled. This is true, both in regard to those characters in

this drama which are developed individualities, and those which are merely individuates. The latter grow purely out of the dialogue and situations, and are the creatures of circumstance or apposition, not free agents.

We will now proceed to the next drama—*As you like it*,—the product of the same year, 1599. Gervinus appreciates an inner relation between the two plays;—we might almost say, the twin dramas. That relation is one of Contrast. Considered, says the critic, as to outward form, the teazing war of wit between Benedick and Beatrice suggests the similar relation of Rosalind to Orlando;—but he adds, that in the development of the plot an opposite course of events at once claims observation. In *As you like it* we commence, not with a family circle in which harmony reigns, but which is to be changed to a temporary discord;—on the contrary, we have "a princely court and a great feudal house apparently at variance with themselves," but who are destined to an ultimate felicity. No doubt, the poet designed such an opposition between the two plays, and regulated his treatment of the present accordingly. We are thus enabled to see how in the same mind one creation grows out of another—and that, indeed, its development in its productivity is a growth, not a mechanism.

It pleased Shakspere to give to his new work a pastoral aspect. He had already represented civic life in the former; he will now away to the forest of Arden, and regard human character from a more

natural point of view. Accordingly, he gives his fancy free play, and recreates himself, as it were, with a holiday in the country, getting rid, for the time, of the restraints of a town life and the trammels of business. He is in Arcadia, and revels in the delights of a shepherd-state of existence, where the animal man enjoys a certain condition of innocence, mainly from its ignorance of vice, not from its tendency to virtue, which in the country exists as little as it does in the city; the proclivity to evil being alike in both places.

In fulfilment of this intention Shakspere resorted to Lodge's romance of *Rosalynd, or Euphues' Golden Legacye.* By this author he was led into the forest of Arden, where Gerismond, the brother of the reigning king of France, was lurking as an outlaw, and also furnished with the circumstances which so providentially conducted his lovers to the same place, and with the incidents of their sojourn therein, even to the purchase of the cottage from a shepherd, and the coquettish disdain of the sylvan beauty Phebe. Even old Adam is borrowed from Lodge's romance. In most of the details Shakspere followed his authority with remarkable fidelity, returning in this to his earlier practice, reserving himself for such display of his poetic skill as might be required in the dialogue, and on the dialogue he bestowed a wealth of fancy which makes the present the most delightful of his lighter plays. The difference between him and Lodge is here most apparent. To the characters of the novel he added Touchstone, William, Audrey,

and Jaques. Touchstone is the first of Shakspere's professed fools, and as such will command our special observation. It was probably as a contrast to him that Jaques was created. Mirth and Melancholy were thus amicably opposed — Il Penseroso and L'Allegro blended; and the spirit of Milton's two exquisite lyric poems anticipated in one exquisite play.

As usual with Shakspere's creations introduced into the borrowed matter of his works, Jaques has become the principal person in the drama. Orlando and Rosalind, the ostensible hero and heroine of the story, subside into accessories. Jaques, who has nothing to do with the action but to moralise, commands the special attention of the audience and the service of the chief actor. It is thus that Shakspere's genius ever asserts its peculiar claims, whatever may be the amount of his indebtedness to foreign sources. He becomes only greater by comparison.

Shakspere has omitted some of the later incidents of the novel, and produced his catastrophe without them. Thus he has no necessity for the rescue of his heroines from robbers; and indeed had used up that incident in his earliest drama, having there added it to the original story. This may go far to prove not only that Shakspere was acquainted with Lodge's *Euphuistic Legacy* from the beginning of his career, but that in constructing his later pieces he consulted the earlier, and did not willingly repeat the same situations. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Love's Labour's lost*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, and *As you*

like it, have many inner links of such relation, not only in regard to what is omitted, but what is repeated.

The poet, in conceiving this fine work, first generated a lofty ideal. His aim was to set forth the power of patience as the panacea for earth's ills and the injustice of fortune, and self-command as the condition without which the power would be inoperative. Neither this power nor its condition can be easily illustrated in the life of courts; but the sylvan life, such as the banished Duke and his companions live in Arden, is favourable to both. In the contrast between the two states of life lies the charm of the play, and the reconciliation of these formal opposites is the fulfilment of its ideal.

Even while dealing with the foreign elements in which the action of the drama originated, Shakspere cannot set to work without instilling into them from the beginning that inner life of which, as their only value, he designed them to become the exponents. Of this inner life Jaques is the representative. I cannot at all concede to the German critic, that there is any thing ill-humoured or malignant in his motives. Jaques regards all things with a transcendental eye, and therefore sees further than others—sees, indeed, that the life of the forest is in due degree subject to moral censure, like the life of the town. He cannot justify man's usurpation over the animals, any more than the Duke's violent seizure of his brother's inheritance: but all this is due to the philosophic temperament, and not to the jaded experience of the

man of the world. Such wisdom as his is no doubt impracticable, and his perception of this fact it is that makes him melancholy. He nourishes a sublime discontent, that neglects to conciliate and entirely repudiates the actual, which contradicts the law of right in his own mind. He will not see that a compromise between the ideal and the actual is needful for such happiness as is possible on earth; and this wilfulness sets him at a distance from the other characters of the play, who patiently await the hour when fortune may recompense them for present injustice. Jaques looks for a better state of existence than the world affords, and accordingly prefers seclusion from it to any participation in its business. He will therefore join the repentant Duke in the "religious life" which he has recently "put on," on the chance of gathering from him new experience of the religious sentiment which holds so cheap all terrestrial wealth and rank, regarding them as nothing comparable to the rewards of piety in a future paradise; for

> "Out of these convertites
> There is much matter to be heard and learned."

Touchstone, like all Shakspere's fools, is a philosopher in disguise, but of the opposite school. He looks at life on its sensible side. So far from its not being good enough for him, in his humility he finds it too good. He is thankful for the smallest blessing—is content with Audrey. She is "a poor virgin, an ill-favoured thing;" but she is his own, and that satisfies him. The smallest possession is to him an

estate. Such a man, unlike Jaques, would make a heaven of earth, not seek a better world in another!

> "The meanest flower that blows to him can give
> Thoughts that do even lie too deep for tears."

His soul is social, he is the furthest possible from a recluse. Jaques and he present the two sides of the philosophical character, and furnish the factors by which the moral element in the play is expressed; and thus it is, with the utmost propriety, that, at its conclusion, they are placed in opposition, so as to produce the final impression. And all is so finely managed that they become suggestive symbols, indicating to the audience more than could be couched in a moral or compressed into a phrase. Accordingly the curtain falls, leaving the mind stimulated, by what it has heard and seen, to reflections which in their silence are more eloquent than the richest speech.

> "Then is there mirth in Heaven,
> When earthly things made even
> Atone together."

Such is the brief hint of the philosophical aim, as we have described it. Shakspere would have us seek it in the æsthetic rather than in the ethical. Between the poles represented by the factors aforesaid, the æsthetic play of the sentiments forthshadowed in the various characters sports in the space measured by the degrees flowing from the two extremes. Here the entire action takes place—a world of infinite relations, subtle and fine as the invisible threads of thought and feeling, yet owning a cosmical law as certain in its operation as the word of Eternal Truth.

The wrong for which a "wise remedy" is to be

sought is stated by Orlando, in the first speech of the play; and for all wrongs growing out of it the remedies so to be sought are similarly qualified. So much, at least, has been learned by court manners, that moderation must regulate all efforts at redress. This is the idea which Shakspere has prescribed for the rule of conduct to his sufferers, and according to which he modifies the plot as received from the romancer. Lodge ascribes acts of violence to Orlando; but Shakspere has carefully eschewed them all, and qualified his youthful hero with the gentleness of the poet and lover, as well as with the endurance and firmness of a brave man. With what modesty as well as boldness he replies to his brother Oliver, who is clearly shown to be the wrong-doer, and to have acted harshly without provocation! And when driven to extremities, Orlando yet determines "no further to offend" his injurer "than becomes himself for his own good." He will observe the due mean, and employ no more force than is needful. Altogether contrary is the course pursued by Oliver; he resorts not only to force but fraud, and engages Charles the wrestler to do him what harm he may in the coming trial of strength between them. This contrast makes the character of Orlando to shine yet more brightly.

Similar virtues adorn Rosalind and Celia, who, in discoursing on their misfortunes, treat them with a reserve and a prudence only possible to amiable dispositions. They are simply not so merry as otherwise they would have been, and are glad of Touchstone's aid to quicken their mirth. Nay, even with

Le Beau they will have their jest, that laughter may divert them from attention to their own sorrows. But withal they are tender-hearted. They compassionate the mischances of the poor wrestlers, and would withhold Orlando from the peril of encountering the strong man Charles. They sympathise with him; Rosalind, as we know, loves, and already Orlando has reciprocated the feeling.

The same causes drive the various sufferers into exile; but they now take with them a new sentiment. For the sorrows of the past they have exchanged love in the present and the future; and therefore go they

> "in content
> To liberty, and not to banishment."

Through love, well-regulated love, the redemption shall arrive; and the forest of Arden is the scene of conflict which issues in the regaining of a better paradise than the one that had been lost. The banished Duke and his companions have already an antepast of the great feast preparing. Custom has already made the sylvan life more sweet than that of painted pomp. They have learned to prefer the woods to the "envious court," and to make a right use of adversity. But even in these woods, as Jaques has taught them, evil exists, and the lower becomes the victim of the superior animal:

> "Thus most invectively he pierceth through
> The body of the country, city, court,
> Yes, and of this our life, swearing that we
> Are mere usurpers, tyrants, and what's worse,
> Do fright the animals, and kill them up
> In their assigned and native dwelling-place."

Nevertheless, the life lies closer to nature; its vices are less complex; it is free from lofty ambition, if not from personal emulation; and, contented with the supply of immediate wants, reposes in comparative indolence. Our lovers soon make experience of pastoral manners. Love is the theme of "solemn talk" between Corin and Silvius; for the latter loves the scornful Phebe, and needs the advice, which he will not take, of his aged companion. Rosalind sees in his the type of her own passion, and thus learns something. But she learns more: that, in the woods as in courts, there are men of "churlish disposition." Of these is Corin's master, who

> "little recks to find the way to heaven
> By doing deeds of hospitality."

But it happens that "his cote, his flocks, and bounds of feed" are on sale, and the wanderers become the purchasers. Orlando and Adam, too, find help in their needs, and, contrary to their expectation, are hospitably received by the noble exiles, who have sought refuge "under the greenwood tree."

And now all have become denizens of this Arcadia, preferring to bear the natural inconveniences of such a life, rather than the unkindness and ingratitude of men in more civilised, but also in more corrupted conditions. Here there is at least leisure for the capricious indulgence of fancy, for those who have a fancy to indulge. Orlando, at least, loses not the opportunity, for he carves love-verses on the barks of trees, and "hangs odes upon hawthorns and elegies on brambles." Touchstone besides, courting Audrey, puzzles with his wit

the uninstructed rustics, who wonder at his strange sayings; and Rosalind pleases herself with mystifying Orlando, concealing her sex, and yet contriving that he shall woo her as the representative of herself. Jaques also amuses himself with the lover, whom he taunts in his censorious style. A difference of character comes out in their brief colloquy. "Will you sit down with me?" demands Jaques, "and we two will rail against our mistress the world, and all our misery." Orlando replies: "I will chide no breather in the world but myself, against whom I know most faults." The lover regards the world with other eyes than the moralist, who has convinced himself that there is nothing in it worth loving. The lover has his melancholy, but it is not that of Jaques. The latter describes his negatively: as "neither the scholar's melancholy, which is emulation; nor the musician's, which is fantastical; nor the courtier's, which is proud; nor the soldier's, which is ambitious; nor the lawyer's, which is politic; nor the lady's, which is nice; nor the lover's, which is all these." It is, he says, "a melancholy of his own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects, and, indeed, the sundry contemplation of his travels; which by often rumination wraps him in a most humorous sadness." A wide experience of man has taught him his defects, and comparing these with a transcendental standard, he mourns ever for the shortcoming which his consience will not permit him to deny, nor his reason to excuse. He stands in shame and sorrow in the midst of a fallen world. Of such a tempera-

ment the pious Recluse is formed; but Shakspere has contemplated the character on the secular side, and thus avoided, as his manner is, theological animosity. The character is thereby elevated to an abstraction, but is not less a person; only it represents the universal in the individual, as indeed is the case with all Shakspere's great characters.

In this fine play, too, is repeated the Shaksperian leading idea, as the great lesson to be taught the age, in sonnet, in lyric, and in drama:

> "Wedding is great Juno's crown;
> O blessed bond of board and bed!
> 'Tis Hymen peoples every town;
> High wedlock, then, be honoured!
> Honour, high honour, and renown,
> To Hymen, god in every town!"

The next play composed by Shakspere is dated two years later, *The Merry Wives of Windsor;* but it carries out the same sentiment. It appears from the quarto of 1602 to have been at first hastily written, but was afterwards revised into the more perfect shape in which we now have it. The story goes, that the subject was suggested by Queen Elizabeth, and the drama composed at her request. Shakspere, they say, completed his task in fourteen days. The task itself was rather a vague one; the notion given by her majesty being simply, "Falstaff in love." Shakspere himself had formally dismissed the character from his mind; but the increasing popularity of the delineation had reached royalty, and the poet was evidently not unwilling to work again upon the idea.

But the poet had now to invent new circum-

stances, unconnected with either the two parts of *Henry IV.* or *Henry V.*, and the critic has a difficulty in assigning a date to the action of the comedy. The more prudent course seems to be to read it between the first and second parts of the former work, in which case we suppose the events to have happened previously to the knight's disgrace. The poet, however, apparently never troubled himself about the matter, content with having to work out the idea with new conditions, and assured that it would find its natural place in the series. We have, indeed, old names to new characters; such as the page and Mrs. Quickly, the latter being now Dr. Caius' servant. As to Falstaff himself, we have him independent of a court life, and in his purely natural character, under temptations strictly private, and in this new view showing still that "the more flesh, the more frailty." The carnal man is free, and misuses his liberty; but he is guilty of no hypocrisy. He makes no pretence of celibacy, but stands honestly for what he is—a fat man who loves sack, and has not forsworn woman. Matrimonial fidelity is assailed, but the holy estate is not dishonoured. There is sufficient reverence in it to stand fast of itself, without the interference of Church or State; and sufficient strength to maintain its ground against any amount of license. The honest wives make a fool of the fat knight, and get the laugh against him. Nor will the poet concede the husband's right to jealousy, but manfully defends the honour of womanhood against Ford's caprices. As yet the poet has not taken a serious

view of the passion, but accepts it as a fair butt to ridicule, and directs his shafts against it without remorse or reticence. As yet it is clear that his own mind is free from any such feeling. He leaves his wife occasionally at Stratford-upon-Avon without any misgiving, and pursues his fortune in London without doubt or fear, with increasing alacrity and with stedfast hope.

Falstaff's love is not a sentiment, nor even an appetite. He has outgrown both; but he makes use of a sportive opportunity that flatters his vanity for the sake of an ultimate gain. He would make the two wives his East and West Indies, and profit by any transaction he may have with them. He pleases himself with the notion that he is an object of love to two respectable women, wives of substantial citizens, but inferior in rank to himself. Of this weakness he lives to repent. However, when convinced that, with all his wit, he has been made a fool of, he takes it in good part, and appreciates the jest, though himself its victim.

"Well, I am your theme; you have the start of me; I am dejected; I am not able to answer the Welsh flannel. Ignorance itself is a plummet o'er me: use me as you will."

There is something noble in the fat old sinner, after all; and Page sees it, and promises that yet Falstaff shall laugh at his wife, who now laughs at Falstaff. And what says Mrs. Page?

"Good husband, let us every one go home,
And laugh this sport o'er by a country fire;
Sir John and all."

No; Shakspere meant not that we should treat his fat knight with contempt. On the contrary, he assigns to him a positive value, and makes him the worthiest figure in the group of which he is the centre.

So much of the plot as relates to Master Brook Shakspere borrowed from a story in *Il Pecorone di Ser Giovanni, Fiorentino*, which, in the translation that Shakspere probably used, is entitled "The Fortunate, the Deceived, and the Unfortunate Lovers." Of this Italian tale Shakspere has made not only an ethical but highly moral use. Whatever certain critics may have said to the contrary, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is a great Shaksperian work.

And now we come to the comedy of *Twelfth Night, or What you will;* which was first performed on the 2d February 1602, and had been probably composed in the previous year.

There are several tales, Italian and English, which bear a resemblance to the serious part of Shakspere's plot. The probability is, that he derived it from Cinthio, who in the *Heccatommithi* has a similar story; or from Riche's *Historie of Apolonius and Sylla;* but he frequently varies from both; and, indeed, the theme may be taken as common property whether of novelists or dramatists, and is treated in an infinite variety of ways. Shakspere dealt with it as he pleased, and added to it a comic plot, which has little to do with the story, and overrides it in a remarkable manner. This comic plot is rich in his own creations, such as Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew

Aguecheek, and Malvolio; so that this is one of Shakspere's character-plays. Of the characters whose idiosyncrasies give motive to the dramatic action, that of Malvolio is the most important. As in Jaques Shakspere had painted the poet in the shape of the religious recluse, so here he has given us another idealist of the same class in the form of a puritan. But as in the former case he had preferred the secular side of the character, avoiding thereby offence to the Catholic mind; so here he presents the man without the name, giving us the moralist rather than the religious puritan. Both characters are archetypal, including all varieties, and therefore the desert hermit and the sectarian pietist along with other possible forms, however numerous. Self-esteem is the primary element in all such characters; pharisaical self-esteem, which induces them to set themselves apart as better than other men. Whether in court or forest, they live the lives of solitaries, and in the busiest societies contrive a solitude of their own. They have no sympathy with the tastes or sports or manners of others, but enshrine themselves as the especial favourites of heaven, and avoid defilement by holding aloof from the ordinary pursuits of their fellow-creatures. No wonder that they excite reaction. The coxcombry of religion, like other coxcombry, provokes more than contempt—it provokes opposition by its presumption. Sir Toby demands, with more reason than becomes a drunken man, "Art thou any more than a steward? Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more

cakes and ale?" And the Fool responds triumphantly, "Yes, by Saint Anne; and ginger shall be hot i' the mouth too." And Maria suggests maliciously, "For Monsieur Malvolio, let me alone with him: if I do not gull him into a nayword, and make him a common recreation, do not think I have wit enough to lie straight in my bed." And so they make up their minds that Malvolio "is a kind of puritan"—(mind, that Shakspere nowhere says that he is a puritan, but only makes him suspected of being such, thus preserving the abstract idea from being unideally realised)—and whether he be or not, that he is certainly a hypocrite of some sort. Maria draws him in full: "The devil a puritan he is, or any thing constantly, but a time-pleaser; an affectioned ass, that cons state without book, and utters it by great swarths: the best persuaded of himself; so crammed, as he thinks, with excellences, that it is his ground of faith, that all that look on him love him; and on that vice in him will my revenge find notable cause to work." And in this particular we know Maria to have been in the right. It is the weak side of the Tartuffes in all ages. The lady Olivia penetrates to the root of the matter, when she says, "O, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste with a distempered appetite. To be generous, guiltless, and of free disposition, is to take those things for birdbolts that you deem cannon-bullets."

And thus, instead of placing the Puritan on the stage, he gives the Universal Character of which the puritan is but a conventional exponent, and in this way enriches the drama with a Classical Person in-

stead of a borrowed and particularised individual, taken, as they say, from real life. As with Jaques, he substitutes the idea of the recluse for a specific example, and thus avoids offending the Catholic world; so, in Malvolio, he substitutes the idea of the rigid pietist for the formal exponent, and thus avoids offending the extreme Protestant world, as he would have done by painting an extravagant portrait of sectarian exclusiveness, such as existed at the period of writing the drama. Our modern playwright would adopt the contrary method, and so copy the individual as to identify him. But Shakspere was not a Foote; much less a ——.

As Touchstone was to Jaques, so is Feste to Malvolio,—his corresponding opposite, and spiritual adtagonist. He has all the excellences that Malvolio affects, and pretends to none. He willingly permits to all their apparent wisdom, so that his folly be allowed as merely apparent too. "Better" also, in his estimation, "a witty fool than a foolish wit." He can be as serious as Malvolio, on proper motive. Witness the song, "Come away, come away, death," which he sings to the duke, and the question he puts to Malvolio, when caged for a madman: "What is the opinion of Pythagoras concerning wild-fowl?" The habits of Feste's mind are philosophical, and in assuming a character he will ape Sir Topas the curate; nay, will put on the beard and gown to help his gravity—for his own sake, not for Malvolio's, who cannot see him. He is as tender of heart as Malvolio would be stern, and acts kindly towards him in his

imprisonment, giving him the means of writing a letter to his mistress, which he faithfully delivers, and thus procures his liberation. Malvolio, it is true, appears little grateful for his favour. But as the action of the play is supposed to extend beyond the fall of the curtain, there can be no doubt he is ultimately reconciled, and conforms his manners more to the taste of others than formerly. Cured of his folly, Malvolio remains a trustworthy steward, and perhaps becomes really as good a man as he had once vainly thought himself. Such is the way in which Shakspere's charitable genius dealt with all its creations.

Besides, the character is only one illustration out of many of the general argument, of which the subject is, love without reasonable hope. Malvolio's is an extreme instance; yet the duke is not a whit more exempt from the folly than the pragmatical steward. With him, love is no less "high-fantastical," and fancy "full of shapes." And what of Viola? Acting as mediate between Olivia and Orsino, loves she not against reasonable hope? And when we find Olivia herself, deceived by the page's habiliments worn by Viola, cherishing a fond love for the seeming boy, do we not find her, too, in the same "cage of rushes"? It is the recurrence of this key-note that decides the tone, and so wonderfully promotes the harmony of the composition. Each character is only a distinct phase of the same idea, one of the conceptions representing it in and to the understanding, and interpreting the formal reason of which the entire work is the

attempted expression. Of these characters, some are touched with beauty, and some with absurdity; but all are poetical, and equal in the esteem of their creator.

Olivia, the wisest of the group, is, in the pursuit of a hopeless passion, as foolish as the simplest. She is, indeed, more elaborate in her folly, and contrives a special means for the accomplishment of her wishes:

> "I did send,
> After the last enchantment you did here,
> A ring in chase of you: so did I abuse
> Myself, my servant, and, I fear me, you."

And so she submits herself to the "hard construction" of the apparent page, who, as far gone as she in the hopelessness of passion, cannot avoid pitying the self-deluded. In tracing such delicate relations no poet ever had a finer tact than Shakspere.

And thus we see that the Inner Life of the characters is the same, and each but its individual exponent, differing only in the accident of its position. The story, in these love-perplexities, grows purely out of the idea; but in respect to the other business of the scene is imported into the drama from the romances which its author had consulted. Thus, like real life, the drama is of a "mingled yarn," the outer and inner crossing each other, blending or conflicting; the former sometimes even concealing that which gives to itself the very solidarity without which it were nothing. Supported by the inner life, the parts cohere, that, left to themselves, would never form a whole, but remain as distant from each other as the poles themselves. It is this which gives con-

sistence to foreign materials, and makes them associates in the same family of events. These events are of no value, save as they form a chain for the electric inspiration which the sage poet intended them to propagate, as its links, throughout the series, for the wonder of the spectators assembled to witness the experiment. Perhaps they may do more; perhaps they may seize on the chain, partake the shock, and extend the influence from one to the other, as, united in the same sympathetic relation, they become willing recipients of the power whose services they had invoked or accepted. That power is the creative genius of the most human of poets; who, because he is so human, has at length become to be recognised as divine by an increasing number of worshippers, whose minds have been enlightened by its flashes, and hearts warmed by the kindly currents, set in motion by the largest mind and strongest heart that ever made the pen the vehicle of thought or feeling, for the benefit of mankind.

Shakspere appears to have anticipated the philosophical discovery of the nineteenth century, that every Idea comprehends a variety of conceptions, and every conception a far larger variety of intuitions. The latter have a narrower scope and a stricter outline than the former; but both have definitions, within which dramatic character may be contained. The higher characters of Shakspere are conceptions as well as individuals, and admit of the universal as well as the personal;—the lower are derived from observation, or reduced to the level and the limits of

sensible experience, and only manifest so much of the pervading idea of the drama as is possible within a conventional sphere, or an individual peculiarity. Thus it happened that, in generating an idea for supplying the inner life of the dramatic action that he had projected, Shakspere *à fortiori* provided himself also with the characters both in the necessary conceptions and the possible intuitions therein formally included, that he might be likely to require in the course of composition. Accordingly, they all have a family relation, belong evidently to the same household, have resemblances and betray affinities, which conduce to that wonderful harmony which is the leading characteristic of Shakspere's riper productions.

CHAPTER II.

External corroborations—Shakspere's outer life from 1594 to 1601—An independent man, and therefore a free artist—The Ideal in the Real seen by him—Refinement and elegance—The Inward Vision—The light of an Idea—Revelation—Taste, its outward action sometimes injurious—Shakspere his own model—His liberty and mental quiet secured, an upward flight possible—Shakspere in 1598 an acknowledged poet—Data and proofs—"Sir John Oldcastle," by Munday, Drayton, Wilson, and Hathaway, attributed to him—Robert Chester's "Love's Martyr"—The death of John Shakspere (1601)—The relation of morals and manners in Shaksperian comedy, and the predominance of the Ideal—Genius, nature, intuition, experience.

SHAKSPERE, now as a legalised "gentleman," and owner of "a place of lordship in the country," is no longer willing to do the task-work of the stage; but at once sets his fancy free to follow its own caprices. He naturally returned to comedy, and wrought with a degree of freedom which lends a charm to the production of the three years of which we have described the fruits in the preceding chapter. During that period he produced four plays, which is about the average extent of his productivity. *Poetic* works are not producible at a more rapid rate; prose plays, such as modern audiences are content with, may be dashed off at a heat; but poetry is distilled from the brain, and not discharged by the waste-pipe. Shakspere now, it must be remembered, was not writing for his

bread, and was independent of his theatre and of his public. Had Shakspere not been independent of popular influence, he might have been injuriously affected by it, as artists are generally who have not risen above the necessities of life, and are fain to work so as to please their customers. From the year 1594 to the end of his career, I see no signs of such a spirit in our Shakspere.

Comedy, of course, led him to study actual society; but whatever might be the Real that he there discerned, he regarded also with especial attention and affection the Ideal in it. He discerned it equally in mean and grand objects. And here let the reader not overlook the fact, that to do this a man first of all must have the Idea. Before he can perceive it in any object, he must have reflected it from his own spirit. Objects are but mirrors; the whole of nature but a looking-glass. Creation is not transparent; but gives us back our own likeness. We look on God's work, and perceive our own image; even as He looks on us, and sees His own.

Shakspere, by his practice, has sufficiently proved to the competent critic, that excellence can only be obtained in this way. We have found that it was the practice of our immortal poet, in taking his subjects from old chronicles or old plays, to commence by giving them a Central Idea, and then to modify or to regulate their treatment by its direction. In this one particular he differed from the earlier chronicle playwrights, who for the most part adopted the theme as they found it, and thought they had done enough

when they had invested it with dramatic action. This was often clumsy enough. It needs the refinement which an idea imparts, as well as the light which it lends, before elegance can supervene on artistic production. No work can be nicely finished that is done in the dark—unless, perhaps, by the blind. But then *these* have an Inward Vision, which is just the very thing I claim for the artist, poetic or other;—the light of an Idea. Such an idea is a light-bearer, for it contains the moral law, which not only illuminates but practically impels to action, and spontaneously directs the path in which action must work.

So long as the mind of the artist is left to its original influences, and these are guided by the operation of its own reasoning powers, that revelation, which always accompanies true art, will maintain him in the practice of the right. His effort will simply be to express the truth that he feels in the language of impulse, whether in form, colour, or words. This is the way with Genius; and especially with genius in the old world; but in the course of time what we call Taste is born, and this same Taste reacts on Genius. If it react on the poet or painter outwardly, it is apt to act in a measure injuriously; for it will seek to "shape its ends," when he should shape them for himself. Shakspere in this respect was happily exempt from undue influence. His own works were the only models that it was worth his while to consult; and these left him free to project improvements and modifications at will. Fortune, too, had elevated him above the crowd, and he was called upon in no

way to submit to persuasion or compulsion, or to surrender in the slightest degree his own judgment and free will to what he might think would please the majority and prove profitable. And the value of such independence is above all estimate. The artist who wishes to effect a compromise, and to please those by whom he would live, and yet to pursue his own way, will probably—I may at once say surely—reap disappointment only, and become fatally discouraged. Shakspere having, like Rembrandt, secured with his fortune liberty and mental quiet, cared for none of these things; and, as we shall find, in our future examination, pursued his upward flight, regardless alike of popular opinion or possible profit. He manifestly worked for himself, and himself alone; and gained an elevation in dramatic excellence, and particularly as a closet dramatist, which is shared by none other.

The year 1598, in which appeared the *Palladis Tamia*, is the inauguration of the epoch of Shakspere's independence. He is now an acknowledged poet. It is true that the age did not value him at the price which Ben Jonson had placed upon him. He is generally mentioned as the equal of other poets of his day—a day rich indeed in poets; but his immeasurable superiority was not perceived. Nor could we expect that it should have been; for, in the first place, the tale of his dramas had yet to be completed, and in the next, they had not been collected in a convenient edition, so as to be comparable one with the other, in the manner in which we can now study them with care, and, after repeated readings, arrive at a

decided conclusion on the whole of the premises involved in the critical argument.

In 1599 the *Historie of Henrie the Fourth* was reissued; not now anonymously, but with the addition "newly corrected by William Shakspere" on the title-page. His name on a title-page was now serviceable; and we find it this year attached to a small miscellany of poems, entitled *The Passionate Pilgrim*, many of which were not written by him.

In the following year, his works are continually issuing from the press; fourth editions of *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece;* two rival editions of *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, and two editions of *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Adoe about Nothing*, *The Second Parte of the History of King Henry IIIIth; Henry IV.*, in two editions. *The Chronicle History of Henry the Fift; Henry VI.* part 2 (*twice*); and *Henry VI.* part 3 (*once*), were also published in 1600.

In books of Elegant Extracts Shakspere's works were now quoted: *England's Parnassus** contains ninety citations from Shakspere; and *Bel-vedere, or the Garden of the Muses*, and *England's Helicon*, also include several. Dramas, moreover, in which he had no part, began to be attributed to him. One, published in 1600, is entitled *The First Part of the True and Honourable History of the Life of Sir John Oldcastle, &c. written by William Shakespeare.* The conception

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* *England's Parnassus: or the choysest Flowers of our Modern Poets.* Published by Robert Allot, a literary bookseller of London, who boasted that he "had picked these flowers of learning from their stem" himself.

of this probably arose from Shakspere's mistake, corrected by his substitution of Falstaff. *The Diary of Philip Henslowe*, however, settles the authorship by this entry: "This 16 of October '99, Receeved by me, Thomas Downton, of Philip Henslowe, to pay Mr. Munday, Mr. Drayton, and Mr. Wilson, and Hathway [*Hathaway*, probably Shakspere's brother-in-law], for the first pte of the Lyfe of Sir Jhon Ouldcastell, and in earnest of the second pte, for the use of the company, ten pownd, I say receved 10 li."

In 1601 we find a poem ascribed to Shakspere in a book by Robert Chester, entitled *Love's Martyr, or Rosalin's Complaint*—"the first essay of a new British poet"—which also contains a few poems "done by the best and chiefest of our modern writers, with their names subscribed to their particular works, *never before extant*." To this year belongs the earliest mention of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which was then entered in Stationers' Hall;—the first sketch, printed in 1602, was reprinted, 1842, for the Shakspere Society, edited by Mr. J. O. Halliwell. In the same year, the Burial-register of Stratford records the death of the poet's father: "1601, Sept. 8, Mr. Johanes Shakspeare." A great sorrow doubtless this to his son William, who was so careful of his respectability as to procure for him the title of gentleman; and who, we must believe, smoothed his declining days with that help and attention which it is surmised they needed.

Shakspere in his comedy has more regard to

morals than manners. He does not merely paint the latter,—but uses them only as accidents, sometimes as shadowing the former and in harmony with them, sometimes as contradictory. Manners are of an age, and regulate conveniently or otherwise the material relations of social intercourse; but they frequently stand in Shakspere in contrast with his principal characters, who are moral beings created ideally, and whose conduct is a rebuke to the temporary conventions by which they are surrounded. His Beatrice and Benedick, like himself, are for all time. Hero will live for ever, like Alcestes still amiable, tried, and pure. Rosalind and Orlando are souls among bodies—spirits dropt from a superior planet among the clods of the earth. Touchstone and Jaques have no time-element in them; they are eminently ideal, and therefore enduringly immortal. Shakspere's comedy, like that of Cervantes, though it make us often laugh immoderately, is as serious as it is elementary, as grave as it is gay. It means more than it says, as if the liberty of thought suffered restriction, and it must needs suggest more than it could speak out. There is a concealed meaning in all the literature of the time; some allegory lurking where one would least expect it. Art—poetry—are hierophants with sacred secrets, which they half-reveal, half-hide. Falstaff, thanks to Queen Elizabeth who wanted more of him, becomes a myth, as if he were originally a fact, not a pure idea; and in the course of time fancies gather about him in the popular mind, and in the author's; and so the latter writes an apocryphal

drama concerning the fat hero, for which it is hard to find a place—an interval—in the more authentic dramas. Paint a character from the ideal side, and see how life-like it becomes. It assumes rank in the world of appearances as a real thing—like a germ, gathers about it all elements, until thoroughly invested with a form which obtains supreme recognition, and is as familiar as it is undying. Malvolio, too, we have shown is a realised idea, and thus becomes a classical person.

These are all creatures of the spirit-world, in which the soul of Shakspere respired, communing with that other spirit-world in which the Kosmos is supported; and hold therefore, as we have already explained, of the highest possible Reality. Had Shakspere condescended to paint the merely actual, as some sciolists have thought, he would not have been able to beget for us these original characters. These are the product of his genius, which, because it is a nature, works like nature; and, by intersecting the forces of the universe, generates new existences, that, while they have analogies with both the inner and outer worlds, possess peculiar attributes, derivable at once from the pure intuitions with which the soul is furnished prior to the birth of the body, and those which experience successively gathers from the anarchy and the chaos into which she is thrown by reason of that event, and which it is her office to reduce to some shape that will in some sort gratify the desires of the mind.

PART IV.

EPIC AND IMAGINATIVE PERIOD.

1601-1613.

CHAPTER I.

Simple construction — General recapitulation — "Othello" eminently a love-tragedy — "Measure for Measure" — its mythological meaning — Poetic insight.

The reader to whom our last paragraph is intelligible will have no difficulty in realising to his own mind the generative processes, the method of working, by which the poet was enabled to arrive at his most artistic results. At the commencement of his career these processes were, of course, rather indicated than developed. There is little of ideality in his earliest works. He is yet dependent on his given materials and his acquired observation. Unconsciously, the ideal is working within him, and impelling him to accept his experiences as the symbols of his inner life, which he feels constantly struggling for utterance: but he has not yet acquired full perception and control of it as an artist. Blindly yielding himself to elementary impulses, his chief care is to master the mechanism of dramatic production, to acquire the skill of the playwright, that he may secure to himself hereafter a perfect vehicle for the diviner utterances of poetic genius, when thoroughly developed and matured. For the present, in effecting this, he keeps close to precedent, and is not above employing the rhymed doggerel and other devices already in thea-

trical use. Moreover, he is overborne by the influence of an education evidently to some degree classical, and otherwise walks in the trammels of studentship, which he cautiously retains, because though they shackle they protect. He has, however, already outgrown many prejudices, and become an adherent of the new learning, which he triumphantly contrasts with the ignorant "dulness" of a departing time, in which "plodders" in high places satisfied themselves with the dictates of established authority, and never ventured on free thought for themselves. He recognises, too, the influence of Love on human happiness, and discourages all asceticism as impediments to progress. Conceding to this influence, in the fulness of its power, the poet's mind becomes generative, and already produces a purely ideal drama, in which the characters are representative of the implied conceptions, and labour together in obedience to a common initiative, without the need even of a story to set them in motion. Delivered now from an anxious regard to the mechanism of his work, the poet's mind conceives freely, expatiates spontaneously, and the result is, that it creates an organism, in which the shape proceeds from an inner principle of growth, and not from the imposition of an external form. He is now in conscious exercise not only of thought, but of free will, and feels his personality rationally pronounced, both with a subjective and an objective reference, and out of these he is now able to display his powers in the formation of Character in which both shall be prominently exemplified. To secure the

latter element, he resorts to an old chronicle or an old play, that he may have foreign material to deal with, and thus gain an apparent actuality for his hero and the events of his history; and as to the former element, he looks inward into his own soul, and shows how lovely and amiable are its constituents, and with what forms of beauty it is filled. To the character of Hamlet, thus constituted, all the persons and incidents of the tragedy are subordinated in a manner already explained. And here let the words "of the tragedy" be well noted; for, be it remembered, *Hamlet* is the *first* tragedy composed by Shakspere.

In such composition, the poet evidently became aware of a new development, and was willing to give it further exercise. Hence, in a new play, constructed on the same principles, he portrayed a heroine similarly circumstanced, and, as a pendant to Hamlet, added Helena to his dramatic gallery, related to the Danish prince as well by points of contrast as of comparison.

And now having delivered his mind of the tasks implied in its latest unfolding, Shakspere turned his attention to a second tragedy, and again resorted to an old story and to a former poem, evidently for the same purpose—that the objectivity of the work might be safely provided for, even at the moment of inception. The extent to which he is indebted to Brooke's production receives in this fact its justification; and the life and vigour which he communicated to the borrowed matter evidenced the vitality of the poet's

powers, and made it, in the highest sense, his own. And thus ended the poet's apprenticeship, and closed the first seven years of the life of the great dramatist.

In the second stage of his career, we find him still anxious to keep on the objective side of things, and to school his natural poetic tendency to prefer the subjective, as displayed in his lyrical and narrative poems, and such plays as were wholly invented by himself. We may recognise in this a conscious self-culture, an educational process, highly becoming in a philosophic mind, and testifying as much to the possession as to the love of wisdom. For the next seven years or more, he mainly devoted himself to the chronicles of his country, though at intervals recreating himself with exercises of fancy, thus cultivating the inner life, while thoroughly instructing his understanding in the relations of the outer by the study of history. Here, too, as in his romantic plays, he begins humbly, trying his powers first with already existing chronicle-plays, and treading with them closely in the footprints of the chronicler. From this preliminary labour he derived many hints, which he subsequently improved. These led him to consider the state of affairs as he found them in the reign of Henry VI., and to trace them back to their causes in the reigns of King John and Richard the Second. He then rushed on to consider their consequences in the history of Richard the Third; and afterwards filled-in the interval by writing the three most finished of his historical plays, the two parts of *Henry IV.* and *Henry V.* Here his art arrived at its culmina-

tion; and, having secured his triumph on this ground, forthwith he turned "to fresh fields and pastures new."

But while thus cultivating the plains of memory, he did not neglect the more elevated regions of fancy. Memory and fancy, as we have already said, are allied so far as this—that fancy is only memory relieved from the order of time. In his earliest historic efforts, the poet's fancy, like that of his predecessors and contemporaries, asserted no exemption from this law. But he no sooner began to work for himself, than he largely availed himself of the liberty by nature belonging to the operations of fancy, and permitted the faculty to revel in the creation of new characters and events, and to make new dispositions of time and place whenever thereby the poetic purpose might be better served. These we find in the *Taming of the Shrew*, *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and in the comic portions of *Henry IV.* and *Henry V.*

And thus passed fifteen years of Shakspere's working life. For the next two or three years he devoted himself to comedy, and no doubt found in it great mental relaxation. Many of the characters in his comic pieces were pure creations of his own imagination, and very exquisite creations too. But they appear to have been comparatively tentative exercises, thrown out in the mind's sportive moods. The manly mind of the poet desired severer exertion. He had already, during the impulsive period of his development, excogitated two tragedies, in which he had

worked on existing materials; but he now aspired at an independent production, in which his imagination should have freer play. He would not trust himself, however, to the invention of the story, lest the treatment, as in former instances, should become too subjective, and repaired again to Cinthio, whose *Hecatommithi* supplied him with the story of Othello. But Shakspere no longer followed implicitly the novelist's authority. He supplied his own motives to the action, and added characters needful for its development. Nor are the characters that he adopted from the romance identical with those that stand for them in Cinthio; all have "suffered a sea-change" by passing through the oceanic mind of Shakspere. Throughout the tragedy, the poet has vindicated his own originality, while adopting the general outline of the Italian fable.

The credulous Moor of the novel is very unlike the loving Othello of the play, and his tempter is moved to his infamous course of conduct by his illicit love for Desdemona. This weak passion is, in the play, transferred to Roderigo—a creation of Shakspere's own, partly as a comic relief to the tragic action, and partly as a link of sympathy with the audience. Iago is the really jealous person, and suspecting Othello with his own wife, hates him accordingly, and determines on revenge. As to the Moor himself, he is thus described:

> "My parts, my title, and my *perfect soul*,
> Shall manifest me rightly."
> "The Moor, howbeit that I endure him not,
> Is of a constant, loving, noble nature."

"The Moor is of a free and open nature,
That thinks men honest, that but seem to be so."
"One that loved, not wisely, but too well;
One not easily jealous, but, being wrought,
Perplexed in the extreme."

And his antecedents were such as to render a noble character possible:

"I fetch my life and being
From men of royal siege; and my demerits
May speak, unbonneted, to as proud a fortune
As this that I have reached."

In this manner Shakspere bespeaks respect for his hero. In his idea, Othello is a "perfect soul," "not easily jealous," and so disposed to love trustingly, that Desdemona

"May make, unmake, do what she list,
Even as her appetite shall play the god
With his weak function."

And now we may fully apprehend the idea of Othello's character as it had been generated in Shakspere's mind. But the idea in its purity was dramatically impracticable. A perfect hero cannot be made interesting, and Shakspere gives to all his heroes, whatever may be their abstract qualities, some human infirmity by which they secure our sympathy. Perfect love, such as would belong to a perfect soul, would "cast out all fear," and that of Othello is so perfect in its degree, that it is "not easily jealous," nor is it naturally suspicious. But it can be "wrought," and therefore there is in his otherwise perfect character a peccant part. From his scene with Emilia, when he throws her the purse, as the portress of Hell's gate, he shows that he has "poured his trea-

sures into foreign laps;" and, from the revelation which Emilia makes of her own character to her mistress, it is not impossible that her husband's ugly suspicions were not ill founded. Othello had been no celibate, nor pretended to be such, and previous to his acquaintance with Desdemona had cultivated some experiences by which his virtue had not been strengthened. There was this flaw in his conduct, and by this inlet both suspicion and jealousy might enter; neither could have found a thoroughfare in a perfectly innocent character. Even the "perfect soul," living the life of camps, had found the preservation of its innocence impossible. In proportion that it had sinned, it had become weak, and thus Othello was laid open to the temptation of Iago, and liable to a further fall. All mankind are, in some respect or other, similarly exposed from similar causes to evil communication; and our conscience therefore leads us to pity and forgive the noble Moor for his obvious fault and the fatal consequences.

These reasons are philosophical and true; and therefore we must not accept Othello as an absolute and direct affirmation of a perfect loving soul, but as a negative instance approximating perfection as near as possible, yet fallible because it could not be identified with it. This view—all but the highest—simply because it is not the highest, makes the character and the tragedy possible.

Iago is, in all respects, not only the opposite but the contrary of Othello. He is naturally jealous and suspicious, because his mind is predisposed to take

the lowest views of things. To him a perfect soul or a perfect love is an impossibility. Love in its purity, as distinguishable from lust, has no place in his thoughts. "If," says he, "the balance of our lives had not one scale of reason to poise another of sensuality, the blood and baseness of our natures would conduct us to most preposterous conclusions;—but we have reason to cool our raging motions, our carnal stings, our unbitted lusts, whereof I take this, that you call love, to be a sect, or scion."

> "Lust, through some certain strainers well refined,
> Is gentle Love, and charms all womankind."

Such is the creed of Alexander Pope, and the Ancient Iago. Consider it well, and we shall see that the theme of the play is Love. In *Romeo and Juliet* Love before marriage was the argument; now it is Love after. The common Idea is differently conceived by the persons of the drama. Othello has, of course, the highest conception of it. With him it is marital Honour, the breach of which is deserving of death. With Desdemona it is fidelity and romantic affection. With Roderigo it is the universal passion which a man, however foolish, may feel, and may exist apart from honour or fidelity; "a toy in blood" to serve as the amusement of youth who have money, but no wit nor employment. With Emilia we know what it was—for she has told us. It is a sentiment that may be transferred from one to another, for a sufficient consideration. With Cassio it is a pardonable weakness, and an occasional indulgence, involving no especial obligation. These are the views

entertained of Love, the lowest belonging to "the poor brach of Venice," Roderigo. He is the medium between the poet and the audience, commanding at once, as he does, the sympathy of the dullest ass in the pit, the grossest god in the gallery. Othello and Iago divide the moral and the intellectual view, and the real debate is between the two principals. The latter is naturally a jealous husband, and the revenge which he seeks is to infect his enemy with the same plague. He has experienced its torment, and would communicate it to his foe. Hear his cry of misery:

> "O! what damnèd minutes tells he o'er,
> Who dotes, yet doubts; suspects, yet fondly loves!"

And he would wring the same cry from the too-trusting Moor. Unfortunately for his victim, there is a joint in his armour loose, as in that of every man, and there enters the poisoned point of his foeman's spear.

The tragedy, however, might not have been possible at all, but for a defect in Desdemona's character. Her passion, we have said, was romantic, and there exists fiction in whatever is romantic. She suffers from illusion, and loves to be deluded. If she is self-deceived, she likewise deceives others. It is on this ground that Brabantio warns Othello:

> "She hath deceived her father, and may thee."

In word, deed, thought, she must have been guilty of falsehood; and, virtuous as she otherwise is, we find in the development of the drama that she has one foible. It is the slightest of foibles, but one

frequently fatal—a habit of fibbing. From a timidity of disposition she frequently evades the truth, when attention to its strict letter would raise a difficulty. Practically, too, she dallies with falsehood:

> "I am not merry; but I do beguile
> The thing I am, by seeming otherwise."

To *seem otherwise* than she is, in order to obtain her end, is at all times lawful in her estimation, not meaning ill, but to make matters easy. Reticent as Hero,—perhaps more so, because her conduct suppressed the truth when it did not falsify it, there was always an amount of "seeming" in it which misled observers:

> "A maiden never bold;
> Of spirit so still and quiet, that her motion
> Blushed at herself."

Yet, all the time, she was carrying on a love-intrigue with a man of another race and colour, in which she was "half the wooer." When this fact is pointed out to Othello, it naturally raises suspicion. One so accustomed to deport herself gives no certain index in her behaviour by which her mental or her moral state may be judged of. All this proceeds not from criminality of disposition, but indolence or susceptibility of temper. Iago practises on the quality:

> "For 'tis most easy
> The *inclining* Desdemona to subdue
> In any honest suit; she's framed as fruitful
> As the free elements."

And, even so, she readily undertakes the case of Cassio, and assures him of success:

> "If I do vow a friendship, I'll perform it

To the last article. Therefore, be merry, Cassio;
For thy solicitor shall rather die
Than give thy cause away."

With her the end consecrates the means, and she regards nothing but the success of her enterprise. How she pleads for Cassio with Othello we know. With characteristic lenity she makes light of his fault, falsely arguing, not unconsciously:

"His trespass, in our common reason,
(Save that, they *say*, the wars must make examples
Out of our best), is not almost a fault
To incur a private check."

And immediately gives us an insight into her little foible, and how habitually she was induced to indulge in it:

"What! Michael Cassio,
That came a wooing with you, and *many a time*,
When I have spoke of you dispraisingly,
Hath ta'en your part, to have so much to do,
To bring him in."

So that Desdemona had not only disguised her sentiments from her father, but had idly sought to do the same from Cassio, who was in the secret. Iago might have, indeed, inferred from this conduct that the "super-supple Venetian," his mistress, was willing to regard the lieutenant with special favour. As she warms in her advocacy with Othello, she puts a further false colouring on the transaction, pretending to disparage the importance to her of the suit she was promoting:

"Nay, when I have a suit
Wherein I mean to touch your love indeed,
It shall be full of poise and difficult weight,
And fearful to be granted."

No lawyer for a fee pleaded more intrepidly in behalf of a criminal client, whose acquittal he desired in the face of the clearest evidence. And in the affair of the handkerchief, we find in her the same indifference to the truth. She had dropped it in a moment of excitement, and probably forgot the fact; but she is at no pains to recollect, and finds it easier to feign an excuse for the nonce, than to cast about for the true reason. She had certainly questioned Emilia about it, and recognised its importance, if Othello were a jealous person; but as he is not, she will not think too much about it. When Othello asks for it, she is frightened into a direct lie:

> "It is not lost; but what an if it were—
> I say, it is not lost.
> *Oth.* Fetch't, let me see't.
> *Des.* Why, so I can, sir; but I will not now."

If, at this critical moment, Desdemona had confessed the truth to her lord, the tragedy would have been prevented, and Iago's plot nipped in the bud. Even on her death-bed the case is the same. She tells Emilia that she had killed herself. Whereupon this brief colloquy:

> "*Oth.* You heard her say herself, it was not I.
> *Emil.* She said so; I must needs report a truth.
> *Oth.* She's like a liar, gone to burning hell:
> 'Twas I that killed her.
> *Emil.* O, the more angel she,
> And you the blacker devil!"

Admitting all the facts, most people will concur in Emilia's estimate of Desdemona's character and conduct. The truth is, that the lady's faults only render her more womanly. They are mainly those of her

sex, ay and of the most amiable of her sex. Desdemona is not a strong-minded, rationalistic woman; but a tender, loving, and devoted one, brought up in the lap of luxury, and swayed by her feelings rather than by her reason. Nevertheless, we should not conceal from ourselves that there is even in this a defect, and that therefrom a number of injurious effects ensue which may end fatally. Shakspere would have us understand all this, and thus acquit Providence of bringing evil on any of his characters without there being a cause in themselves for its production. It is the same in real life. All our misfortunes are in some sort due to our own conduct; and so we may convince ourselves by permitting conscience to bring back certain motives from the depths of the consciousness which, however apparently trifling, have had only too much influence in our life and action.

Love in its purity is a divine impulse, but in its manifestation necessarily corresponds with the nature of the conduit through which it passes, and receives a number of modifications by which the sacred idea is sometimes distorted, and always impaired. That man should then begin to fear and doubt, should begin to suspect and grow to be jealous, is, alas! only too natural; or external pressure may be brought to bear on the individual mind, and thus from without evil be suggested, which the mind untempted would not readily assume for itself.

The opinions and motives that actuate Iago are such as never can be entertained by any good man. His whole nature is corrupted by them, and he cor-

rupts others by contact. He is a walking pestilence. All who come within the sphere of his influence are in danger, and the worse for having made his acquaintance. Emilia, Roderigo, Cassio, even Desdemona, suffer from his proximity, and their characters sink below their normal level in his fatal presence. He has the fascination as well as the power of a demon. Already had Shakspere portrayed one Satanic person in Richard III.; in Iago he has improved on the conception. Both are more intellectual than their companions; but the usurping Duke resorts to violence and murder, and such clumsy expedients, for the accomplishment of his purposes. Iago trusts to his wits. He "works by wit, and not by witchcraft, and wit depends on dilatory time." He is capable of patience, and can bide his time. Violence and murder, whether by himself or others, are indeed the ends he aims at; but for the means he trusts to his own practice and ingenuity. His intellectual superiority thus becomes apparent; and we admire his skill while we detest his acts. A strong interest is even excited in his favour; an æsthetic interest, which requires all our moral vigilance to control.

Shakspere has treated the subject of jealousy in two other dramas; one previous to this, and the other subsequent. In those, he has set the passion in a ridiculous light; in this only in an odious and serious one. But in all it is observable that the suspected heroine is innocent. The wives of Windsor and Hermione are innocent, as well as Desdemona. The poet paid this homage to the sex; and it is but fair to

conclude that the conduct of his own wife justified him in this belief. In the face of this evidence, the traditional supposition that Shakspere himself suffered from jealousy is monstrous in the extreme. The leaning of his mind is all the other way. There is no such flaw in his noble nature. The filthy passion is the object of his contempt or abhorrence.

It is supposed that Shakspere must have read Cinthio's novel in the original Italian, as no translation of it is known to have been in existence. From him he adopted the material motive to the tragic action—filial disobedience. Paternal tyranny had been treated in *Romeo and Juliet;* here we have the fault of the child. Brabantio, indeed, shows a disposition to domestic despotism; but it does not appear that he had indulged in it. He may have talked of it, however, before the elopement, as he did afterwards. The fear that this raised in Desdemona's mind was sufficient to induce a nature like hers to secrecy. But Othello, with all his notions of honour, must have concurred in the deception, and thus shared her fault. Here we perceive that the honour of the noble Moor was no more perfect than his love; he is only negatively their champion. An honourable man, there was a point at which the principle might give way. It did so; and thus in the end he justly sacrificed himself, as he had his wife, to the deities he had offended.

I know not whether the poet had any design in it, but it may be, and perhaps profitably, remarked, that the action of the third act takes place on a Sunday. Desdemona marks the time in the following lines:

"*Oth.* Went he (*Cassio*) hence now?
Des. Ay, sooth; so humbled,
That he hath left part of his grief with me,
To suffer with him. Good love, call him back.
Oth. Not now, sweet Desdemona; some other time.
Des. But shall't be shortly?
Oth. The sooner, sweet, for you.
Des. Shall't be to-night at supper?
Oth. No, not to-night.
Des. To-morrow dinner, then?
Oth. I shall not dine at home;
I meet the captains at the citadel.
Des. Why, then, to-morrow night; or Tuesday morn;
On Tuesday noon, or night; on Wednesday morn;
I prithee, name the time."

This conversation takes place in the open air, as does also Iago's temptation immediately following,—that is, in the Shaksperian text,—but on the stage the actors transact all this business improperly in a palatial apartment. Rather in the arrangements of the scene, the different persons engaged in it should appear as if coming from their devotions. In the next act we find Othello derisively alluding to having seen the meretricious Emilia so engaged; and this event may have happened on this very Sunday, and probably had:

"This is a subtle whore,
A closet-lock-and-key of villanous secrets:
And yet she'll kneel, and pray. I have seen her do it."

Emilia's supposed hypocrisy embitters Othello both against her and her calumniated mistress. Perhaps, too, the poet intended his free-thoughted and noble Moor to entertain a customary protest against superstitious ceremonies; and here we have a glimpse vouchsafed of his religious tendency. It is in this

furtive manner that Shakspere always alludes to the theological aspects of his theme. Never will he altogether neglect them; but nowhere will he thoroughly unveil them. Both political and religious prudence are evidently observed by Shakspere in the treatment of all his subjects. The spirit of the time compelled him to this reticence.

The same work of Cinthio gave to Shakspere the subject for his drama which he wrote in the following year, 1602,—I mean *Measure for Measure.* A previous play on the subject exists of the date of 1578, entitled *The Historye of Promos and Cassandra*, by George Whetstone, which is in two parts, from which our poet has derived many suggestions. But the main idea was his own. Avoiding, as he had always done, any direct dramatic development of ecclesiastical history, this fable gave him the opportunity of presenting his opinions on it by way of an ingenious allegory. The leading incident of it, indeed, carries us back to more than one of the parables of the New Testament, as a reference to Matt. xxv. 14, Luke xix. 12, and Luke xx. 9, will show. The man travelling into a far country, and committing the charge of his goods to his servants, and on his return exacting an account from them of the manner in which they had employed the talents intrusted to them; the nobleman that departed for a distant land to receive a kingdom, and who left a similar charge to his ten ministers with a similar result; and the vineyard-planter who went abroad, and sent his ambassadors to the husbandmen, who beat them and cast

them out, until he thought it right to send his son and heir, whom they killed, and thus it became needful that he should return himself, and destroy the unfaithful husbandmen; all these parables bear a specific analogy to the conduct of the Duke Vincentio, who leaves to Angelo and Escalus the vicegerency of Vienna during his absence. With regard to the former, he proposes a special problem:

> "What figure of us think you he will bear?
> For, you must know, we have with special soul
> Elected him our absence to supply,
> Lent him our terror, drest him with our love,
> And given his deputation all the organs
> Of our own power."

The Duke, however, does not really leave his kingdom, but wanders up and down in it disguised as a friar, observing all that takes place both on the part of the governing and the governed. Thus it is that Divine Providence, while it deputes its authority to the office-bearers of the world, is still present both with them and it, and ever ready to punish the evil-doer. But among such office-bearers Angelo is distinguished for an apparent fitness and excellence, one from whose merits we might reasonably expect peculiarly good results. "There is," says the Duke, when confiding to him his commission,

> "Angelo,
> There is a kind of character in thy life,
> That, to th' observer, doth thy history
> Fully unfold. Thyself and thy belongings
> Are not thine own so proper, as to waste
> Thyself upon thy virtues, they on thee."

Now, in the dealings of Providence with the world,

there was one fact which had acquired paramount importance in Shakspere's age—that of a recognised prince whose claims were of the highest kind and degree, whose apparent strictness of discipline, sincerely enforced in the first instance, had led to a most vicious reaction, and a depravation of morals, and ultimately to a personal participation in the guilt for which he nevertheless punished others. On the great stage of the world this drama had been acted, and the severity and criminality of the offending potentate had been exposed and visited with public censure and public loss. A spiritual power had been established as Christianity advanced in influence, and promised a more perfect rule of government than had ever before been exerted. That power had been intrusted to men whose antecedents had all borne especial reference to the office. They had been taught to regard the spiritual as exclusively worthy of cultivation, and the sensual as only to be depressed and extinguished. In their one-sided apprehension, they forgot that God had created both, and that each had its proper limits. They aimed not only at the supremacy of the spiritual, but the destruction of the natural man altogether. Mankind, accordingly, groaned under an intolerable yoke, which, until it could be got rid of entirely, they sought to evade, while they hypocritically pretended to revere it; and so general had the custom of evasion become, that instances had occurred of the great office-bearer himself adopting the practice, whilst affecting the greatest sanctity. This course of conduct proceeded for gene-

rations with impunity, until the more philosophic minds of succeeding ages began to perceive the evils that it was bringing on society, and society itself to feel them in its daily intercourse. Need there was for a great deliverance; and at length the same Providence that had permitted in its wisdom the trial to take place, interposed to prevent its further continuance, and violently initiated those reforms which have since exercised so beneficial an operation both in Church and in State, leading to a restoration of purity in religion and of freedom in the civil relations of life.*

This was the great lesson which had been read to the world; and this lesson the outline of Cinthio's story enabled Shakspere to repeat in *Measure for Measure*, as a dramatic parable. Judged in this light, such objections as Coleridge and others have taken to the plan and execution of the play vanish at once. Disagreeable matter may be found in it; but it belongs also to the hidden argument which the poet had intended to develope or illustrate.

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* Gregory VII., in subscribing to the necessity of enforcing celibacy among the clergy, was guided by a profound policy. His aim was an ecclesiastical autocracy in Europe, under the Pope, and independent of the civil power. Marriage, therefore, was prohibited to the ecclesiastic, to prevent him from handing down his riches and dignities as hereditary possessions, so that he might have no interest in opposing the central government at Rome, by combining with other individuals in pursuit of similar interests. Promotion must be looked for from Rome, and a natural descent from father to son absolutely prevented, in favour of an artificial or spiritual system, by which every man should hold his advancement from the Church, and not from his ancestor or family.

Angelo, instated in his office as the vicar of his absent principal, proceeds at once to show the strictness of his moral government. He insists on chastity in the subjects of the State as strictly as Hildebrand had insisted on celibacy in the subjects of the Church; and with the same result. The offence of Claudio was committed while the law was sleeping. Angelo has but just awakened it, and yet proceeds against Claudio as if he had transgressed while the law was vigilant. When Angelo himself is tempted to transgress, he has no such excuse, for he himself had previously given new life and force to the law. The law itself Shakspere describes as oppressive and severe—one which had become obsolete because unreasonable in itself, and indeed an outrage on nature. Angelo, therefore, aims at re-action, not progress; and is destined to political failure from the beginning. But in his failure unfortunately others are concerned, and especially the State which he misrules. The Church suffered from the denaturalising laws to which it had been unwisely subjected by unreasoning bigots, and we meet with her representative in the sister of Claudio—Isabella—who is about to become a votarist of St. Clair, but has not yet taken the veil. The body of the Church speaks in her as it has spoken at all times to her demented rulers, who from over-strictness have introduced into her sacred precincts that harlotry which it was their ostensible purpose to discourage. Such has always been the voice of her laity and humbler clergy, —that is, of the thinkers among them, who are alone to be regarded as the articulate members of any com-

munity. But her cardinals and pontiffs pay to such little heed, apparently unconscious that while Providence has deputed them to judge others, its watchful eyes are likewise on them; observing their conduct, as well as that of their victims, in order to final legislation on both.

> " More reasons for this action
> At our more leisure shall I render you ;
> Only, this one : Lord Angelo is precise ;
> Stands at a guard with envy ; scarce confesses
> That his blood flows, or that his appetite
> Is more to bread than stone : hence shall we see,
> *If power change purpose*, who these Seemers be."

To strip off this "seeming" from character, we find, is continually an object with Shakspere,—to penetrate below the surface is ever, as it were, his one philosophic aim. Whether with Hamlet, who knows not "*seems*," or with Hero and Desdemona, whose virtuous "seeming" is at one with their real characters, and yet to be distinguished from that which is deeper than appearance, our dramatist affects a Poetic Insight which reaches to the inmost recesses of the soul; and exercises a discrimination "quick, powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart." In the present drama this general aim is intensified and concentrated, making thereby the play the special example of his spirit in dealing with those refined hypocrisies which the most pious can no more avoid than the more vulgar can the grosser specimens. And in thus revealing the Inner Life of his dramatic persons he has necessarily re-

vealed his own. A purer vital tablet was never exposed to severe criticism than the almost immaculate soul of this great poet.

The remedy proposed by Isabella for repairing her brother's wrong to her cousin Juliet, "O, let him marry her," is rendered impossible by Angelo's straining of the law. And can it be true that "he doth so seek his life?"—that the Claudios stand in such danger from the Angelos? Ay, verily:—then must the Isabellas "see what they can do."

The intercessor on behalf of Claudio to Isabella is Lucio, a character not properly estimated by the commentators. He is described by Shakspere as a "Fantastic." During the providential suspension of a discipline, always in danger of becoming odious, the license of manners permitted individual minds to grow up immethodically, so that a strange mixture of attributes capriciously combined would in many cases be the result. We have in Lucio, therefore, a generous nature, capable of friendship, and of venerating virtue, which nevertheless inclines to an immoral life, and grows vain of imaginary merits which its indolence will not permit it to realise. The character of Lucio grows out of this idea, which is Shakspere's own, and suggested by the state of society in which the dramatic action is supposed to occur. This man—a vain man, but also a man of the world—serves the poet as an excellent chorus, and it is from him we learn right early in the play the probable inutility of Angelo's severe proceedings. In his person Shakspere could venture beyond the limits of conventional man-

ners, and advocate the liberty of nature, without giving so much authoritative emphasis to the defence as to appear to justify a relaxation of moral principle in the abstract. Lucio accompanies Isabella to Angelo, and stimulates her to those pleadings which so move the precisian that they tempt the sin-punisher himself into sin. They touch him with a sense of human infirmity, and lead him to a justification of conduct in his own person which he will not extend to that of another. As a man they prove him to be human, but not as a judge. In that artificial character they leave him still severe and inflexible. Consider Isabella as a dedicated nun and thus a symbol of the Church, his proposed criminality with her, while he punishes her brother, has a still deeper significance:—the private corruption of the State itself which publicly he pretended to purify. He is won to this by the very sanctity and beauty of the institution which he seeks to prostitute to self-indulgence; and he is thus strangely seduced into this error, that ultimately, not only as a man but as a judge, he may be humanised and act sympathetically with mankind, as one "having a feeling of their infirmities,"—(a fault charged on the Duke by Lucio)—in imitation of him whose vicar he is. An extreme spirituality is one-sided; it must be brought over again, at all costs, to the naturalism from which it has divorced itself, so that a rule of moderation may be substituted for that severity which, requiring impossible concessions, may punish, but cannot reform. And thus the poet points the moral in his drama where history had already pointed it, and

showed to the reactionists of his day, who would rule Church and State on the principle of laws which had grown obsolete, but which they were continually seeking to revive, the worse than futility of their endeavours. Had the Charleses and the Jameses but consulted the spirit of Shakespere, as revealed in this fine play, and understood the oracle, which, as usual in such cases, is purposely ambiguous,—one might have retained his crown, and the other saved his head. Can we believe that these were as repentant as Angelo—that "sorrow stuck so deeply in their penitent hearts, that they craved death more willingly than mercy"? Or that Shakspere, in the gentleness of his disposition, prophesied of them more mildly than they personally fulfilled his foretelling? Or, at that Second Advent, when the Rulers of the World shall stand before the bar with those whom they have condemned, shall they then make confession of their sin, and sorrow, and be pardoned for being human as men, after having presumptuously claimed to be superhuman as judges? Shall all assertions of a "Right divine to govern wrong" end in similar remorseful supplications, and obtain pardon on the ground of repentance? Coleridge, indeed, doubted whether such men as Angelo could be truly repentant; and we may ask with terrible uncertainty, will that gift of repentance be granted to the Pharaohs who have hardened their hearts, and oppressed the children of Israel?

> "Man, proud man,
> Drest in a little brief authority,
> Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
> His glassy essence, like an angry ape,

> Plays such fantastic tricks before high Heaven
> As make the angels weep ; who, with our spleens,
> Would all themselves laugh mortal."

How is it, with such a passage in this play, that commentators have so missed its ruling meaning and pervading aim? Penitence, moreover, is properly predicated of Angelo, as a symbolic character, as an office-bearer, and as therefore representing the office, which in his successors was capable of repentance. Shakspere here perfectly understood the Protestant Reformation as it was conducted by its leaders in this country, who were careful to leave the forms and offices of the institution untouched, not abolishing the frame and order of bishops, priests, and deacons, but merely appointing to the vacant places men of a wiser and a milder spirit, who, in serving God, were not in the habit of thinking that they must slay or otherwise persecute their fellow-men by virtue of privileges not accorded to the rest of mankind.

I have no wish to make the allegory concealed in this drama run on all fours with the events contained in it. It might, however, be most easily done; but, when once the hint has been given, I hold the fact to be so transparent, that I may safely leave the reader to his own inferences.

Lucio, however inferior to the more respectable characters of the piece—(the moral of which is, that we are all sinners, and therefore should be tender-hearted to one another)—is brought into contrast as superior to Pompey, whose calling is as base as his birth. But he is immediately placed in his proper

relation, in his after conversation with the supposed friar, as a sort of mediate between the Pompeys and their rulers. He has his jest upon Angelo's severity and character, and the Duke's absence, not sparing his reputation either, ascribing his lenity, as we have already stated, to a fellow-feeling for the weakness of the vicious, and impeaching his wisdom with no little scurrility in the terms. All this is done (apart from the mystical meaning of it) from mere frivolity, not from malice, for Lucio professes that he not only knows but loves the Duke; and he does both in a fashion, *longo intervallo*, not from intimacy, but only on general rumour. He speaks, like a fantastic, from his fancy, on insufficient information coloured by the state of his own feelings. His calumnies partly grow from a misestimate of his own character, which he thinks quite respectable enough; and in representing that the Duke is a man like unto himself, he is not really conscious of injurious slander. He "spoke it but according to the trick." Providence, indeed, like the sun, shines alike on both the evil and the good, and therefore may be described as condescending to the former, even patronising them;—but the doctrine (and it exists in the books of learned men) that implicates him in their ill-doings—

> "for we bid this be done,
> When evil deeds have their permissive pass,
> And not due punishment"—

is nevertheless a narrow-minded slander on the moral goodness of the Deity. But Lucio, in the end, is to be taught a different appreciation of that Power

whereto all other powers are vicegerents. To him also belongs the merit of divesting the Duke of his disguise, and showing to the dismayed Angelo that his "grace, *like power divine*, had looked upon his passes." In this brief quotation we find that the poet gives the same interpretation of the Duke's character and conduct that is implied in our remarks. That interpretation adopted, the rest of the theory naturally follows. Further to confirm the intended application, the Duke offers his hand to Isabella, thus uniting Church and State. Albeit, "in probation of the sisterhood," Isabella may not be condemned to the nunnery. She shall be no Celibate. A closer reference to Luther's conduct, in having married a nun, could not have been dramatically indicated. The higher reference to a still more sacred union we leave reverentially, as the poet designedly left it, within the veil. That is not for a theatre, but a holier place:

> "So, bring us to our palace; where we'll show
> *What's yet behind*, that's meet you all should know."

In structure and diction this play is one of the most careful and beautiful of Shakspere's compositions.

This drama, thus interpreted, serves to show us how far the poet was before his age. The reaction which it opposed continued until the French Revolution; nor, indeed, can it be said to be yet nonexistent. The freedom of the subject, and the impolicy of punishment where it can possibly be avoided, has not, to the extent advocated by Shak-

spere, yet obtained in the world. A remark made on this subject by Gervinus is so very pregnant that it justifies quotation. He notices that the Duke, in all the instances forming the catastrophe of the drama, threatens punishment, but never executes it. He prefers rather "intimidation in suspense, threats, and torments of imagination, but in cases of actual penalty he permits mercy to rule when possible, thus giving opportunity for moral reformation. Like Escalus, he pursues sinners by habit and trade rather than the casual fallen one, the bawd and the seducer rather than the seduced; thrice they warn even the more punishable of their punishment; and the poetic punishment which meets this trade in Pompey is not the removal of the person, but the investing it with dishonour and with the detestation which belongs to the hangman's office. The Duke despairs not even of the dull Barnardine; he wants advice, is his first thought upon the picture sketched of him; and although in his own opinion this murderer has justly incurred the penalty of death, he attempts at last, even in him, the effect of instruction."

So merciful was Shakspere; and such were his elevated views equally of the way of Providence with man, and of the government in relation to him with which a few are invested for the benefit of the many.

CHAPTER II.

Complex Structure. (*a*) Conventional—Shakspere's choice of epic subjects, such as "Lear," and his introduction of episodes into the ground-plan—"Troilus and Cressida"—These dramas not written for the sake of popularity, but for his own satisfaction as an artist —They are transcendental in their character; but they are also conservative as against the reactionists of his age, and intended to reëstablish conventions, disturbed by revolution, but designed to be better secured by the Reformation—The reconstruction of order and authority henceforth his aim—Differences between Shakspere and Homer—Analogies between him and Bacon—"Cymbeline"—This play also in favour of marital conventions—Treats of a period more civilised than the two former plays—Mulmutius Dunwallo, the legendary founder of our laws—Shakespere's knowledge and art—Dr. Johnson's incompetency as a dramatic critic—Shakspere's testimony in favour of woman and of marriage—"A Winter's Tale" —Ballad literature—Second marriages.

(*b*) Universal—Ideal and purely Poetic—Imagination—"Macbeth"——Superstition—Pertains to the age as well as to the hero—The weird-sisters used as exponents of his mental state—Correction of some mistakes usually made as to the relative positions of Macbeth and his wife—The symbolic nature of this tragedy, and its treatment—The English equally superstitious with the Scotch at the period of the action—The relative nexus of religion and superstition—Political motives, with the superstitious, dominate right—Lady Macduff—The cluster of Roman plays—"Coriolanus"—"Julius Cæsar"—"Antony and Cleopatra."

(*c*) Abstract and Intellectual—The purely imaginative and ideal play of "The Tempest"—Shakspere's two last, and somewhat incomplete, dramas of "Timon of Athens" and "Henry VIII."—The Globe Theatre burned down.

(*a*) Conventional.

A comparatively simple structure had sufficed Shakspere in the composition of the two preceding plays. He now manifestly emulated a more epic and com-

plex method. He sought a story with episodes; and he found one in that of King Lear, or, more properly speaking, he made it such. He resorted to the legendary period of English history for his leading materials, for in that period the imagination could assert its privileges; and he added to those materials an incident from the *Arcadia* of Sir Philip Sidney, that by the help of an episode he might invest his tragedy with an epic character. For the former he went to Geoffrey of Monmouth and Camden, and also derived something—but that something not much—from a previous drama on the subject, which had been conceived and executed in the spirit of a chronicle-play. This was not the spirit in which Shakspere undertook the mighty argument. His *King Lear* is emphatically a tragedy, and the greatest of all tragedies. Mark, I say the greatest of all tragedies—not the greatest of all dramas. Tragic elements are alone those of which this marvellous work is compounded; and they are mingled and balanced with consummate art. To some Shakspere's *Lear* may appear an irregular, somewhat chaotic work; to me it appears, both in its inner spirit and its outward form, the most artistic work in the world.

The leading incident of the first act, derived from the old legend, has been condemned. The justification for this, however, is contained in the statement, *it is* "derived from the old legend." The advantage proposed to himself by a dramatist in selecting a story from an old chronicle, a legend, or a romance, is, that in so doing he goes out of himself and takes

something from authority; thus, in the first instance, securing the element of objectivity in the original argument of his work. Thereupon he can all the more confidently let the subjective supervene, and gradually pervade it with that inner life whose fountain is in himself. He thus gets rid of the responsibility of asserting the probability of the main incidents, but accepts them as admitted actualities, and also as things which it would be unlikely that he would have invented.

Coleridge on this point remarks, that *Lear* is the only serious performance of Shakespere the interests and situations of which are derived from the assumption of a gross improbability; whereas Beaumont and Fletcher's tragedies are, almost all of them, founded on some out-of-the-way accident or exception to the general experience of mankind. Beaumont and Fletcher, no doubt, in this way sought to give an appearance of objectivity to their themes; but we think that Shakspere's practice is better grounded. Our transcendental critic proceeds to remark on the poet's matchless judgment in treating his borrowed materials. First, allowing the improbability of Lear's conduct in the first scene, he asserts as his stand-point that "it was an old story rooted in the popular faith—a thing taken for granted already, and consequently without any of the effects of improbability;" and secondly, he contends that "it is merely the canvas for the characters and passions—a mere occasion for —and not, in the manner of Beaumont and Fletcher, perpetually recurring as the cause and *sine qua non*

of, the incidents and emotions. Let," he adds, "the first scene of this play have been lost, and let it only be understood that a fond father had been duped by hypocritical professions of love and duty on the part of two daughters to disinherit the third, previously, and deservedly, more dear to him; and all the rest of the tragedy would retain its interest undiminished and be perfectly intelligible. The accidental is nowhere the groundwork of the passions; but that which is catholic, which in all ages has been, and ever will be, close and native to the heart of man—parental anguish from filial ingratitude, the genuineness of worth though coffined in bluntness, and the execrable vileness of a smooth iniquity."

A consideration of *Lear* naturally leads us back to the subject and prevailing spirit of Shakspere's first tragedy, *Hamlet.* Both are based on filial obligation. Yet how different the treatment! The first, a simple straightforward development of a single story; the second, a complex illustration of the great theme, by means of a leading action with interdependent episodes. The venerable paternity is also produced, not as a shadow from the spirit-world, but an actual living person with material surroundings. And on this depends much of the majesty which we all feel to belong to this drama. It is, indeed, owing to this that *Lear* is the most sublime of Shakspere's works.

We have said this tragedy is the greatest in the world. Its subject is the greatest. Paternal love, suffering violence, and, being angered, becoming awful

as it is divine. The most awful of exhibitions is a Wroth Love. Wonderful is Shakspere in representing the antagonism of the sentiments. Reflect that all representation is by antagonism. O, that it were not so—that in purity, the pathetic, as the ground of the sympathetic, might be rendered substantially present, even as now it is accidentally visible in antipathy and conflict! The relation which connects father with child, and the mother with the father, should be even the same as makes the father at one with the Love, of which the father's heart is, in all its beatings, but the pulse, and the paternal affections but the noblest throes. There is a power, a central band, as it were, by which the divinity of Love unites two elements, and synthesises them in results, both visible and invisible. What is earth itself but a relation, by which Love's divinity reconciles men and animals? Of this the paternal sentiment is an application, and progresses from the universal relation which is the matrix of all, and to which, as to a common parent, both father and child must be referred. To it all self-will, which is so often substituted for the universal relation whereof it is the lowest mode, should be surrendered; so that in one spiritual being all intellect and energy should conspire to a purpose and an end simply divine.

But in dramatic art we must be content with negative instances. Lear must, accordingly, be portrayed as a human father. Yet his love must have been strong and high, which, even in dotage, could think of divesting itself of *all*, for his offsprings'

sake. In him, at previous periods, how strongly must have been the sublime and universal relation exhibited, that of father and child; nay, in Lear, the whole sentiment of parentage is centered in one person. For his children have no mother; in him the maternal with the paternal phases of love are exhibited in common. The subject of the drama is not only of exceeding dignity, but of surpassing tenderness. There is a womanly yearning in the love of Lear for his children that agonises the heart, which revolts at their ingratitude.

The old dramatist, the ballad, and Shakspere agree in deviating from Holinshed by making Lear resign the *whole* of his kingdom and power. The simple statement of the historian is, that Lear "willed and ordained that his land should be divided after his death between the husbands and the daughters; and the one-half thereof immediately should be assigned to them in hand;" and it was not till "after Lear was fallen into age, the two Dukes that had married his two eldest daughters, thinking it long ere the government of the land did come to their hands, arose against him in armour, and reft from him the government of the land, upon conditions to be continued for term of life, by which he was put to his portion, that is, to live after a rate assigned to him for the maintenance of his estate, which in process of time was diminished as well by Maglanus as by Hennius."

Holinshed, the old play, and the ballad, agree in sending Lear to France. Shakspere's arrangement has (*inter alia*) the advantage of considerably simpli-

fying the action. The ending of the old play also was happy—the undutiful daughters are deprived, and Lear reinstated. There is a slight difference in the ballad, according to which Cordelia is slain, and Lear dies of grief. The alteration by Tait of Shakspere's tragic into a fortunate catastrophe was a monstrous change, in opposition to Shakspere's deliberate judgment. It is with an evident purpose that the great poet changed the *dénoûement* of the old play. Witness Kent's speech at the king's death:

> "Vex not his ghost: O, let him pass! he hates him
> That would upon the rack of this tough world
> Stretch him out longer."

In all this our mighty dramatist has evinced consummate judgment, as also in his portraiture of the character of Lear, whom he has drawn *not* as a perfect father. His daughters' blemishes are mirrors of his own. The old play, on the contrary, endeavours to assign external occasions for his conduct. He acts on the instigation of Regan and Goneril. Before he can reply to Cordelia's modest tender of the duties of a child, his dissatisfaction is prompted by her sisters'.

> "*Gon.* Here is an answer answerless indeed;
> Were you my daughter, I should scarcely brook it.
> *Reg.* Dost thou not blush, proud peacock as thou art,
> To make our father such a slight reply?"

It appears also, afterwards, that they persevered in their wicked schemes:

> "*Gon.* I have incenst my father so against her,
> As he will never be reclaimed again.
> *Reg.* I was not much behind to do the like."

The rage and inflexibility of Shakspere's Lear emanates

from an internal spring—from the mind of Lear; thus tracing home all good and evil to their true source—individual character. It is due to every man's moral position, that his physical position is what it is.

In tracing a comparison between Shakspere's *Lear* and the old play, we cannot avoid noticing the singular use made of certain passages. Thus, in the latter, Lear observes:

> "I am as kind as is the pelican,
> That kills herself to save her young ones' lives."

The obvious image of Lear sacrificing himself for the benefit of his children, Shakspere disregarded. His mind preferred a more recondite use of a familiar simile, and accordingly passed on to the more remote conception of Lear's children, like the young of the pelican, glutting themselves on their parent's substance:

> "Is it the fashion that discarded fathers
> Should have thus little mercy on their flesh?
> Judicious punishment! 'twas this flesh begot
> *Those pelican daughters!*"

Mrs. Montague shows how superior Shakspere is to Sophocles in dramatic delineation, by a comparison of *Œdipus Coloneus* with *Lear*. Sophocles, she says, makes Œdipus expostulate with his undutiful son. The injured parent exposes the enormity of filial disobedience, and sets forth the duties of this relation in a very strong and lively manner; but it is only by the vehemence with which he speaks of them, and the imprecations he utters against the delinquent son, that we can guess at the violence of his emotions. Accordingly, he excites more indignation at the con-

duct of Polynices than sympathy with his own sorrow, of which we can judge only as spectators; for he has explained to us merely the external duties and relations of parent and child. The pangs of paternal tenderness thus wounded are more pathetically expressed by Lear, who leaves out whatever of this enormity is equally sensible to the spectator, and immediately exposes to us his own internal feelings, when, in the bitterness of his soul, cursing his daughter's offspring, he adds:

> "That she may feel
> How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
> To have a thankless child!"

The Lear of Shakspere is a human father. He is not the Divine Love manifested, only an individual exhibition—one which, even at its highest state of excellence, stands in contrast, and must not be confounded, with that universal relation which it modally and partially illustrates. Not the paternal Love is he, though its witness, and sent to bear witness thereto, through the medium of Shakspere's genius, on the stage of a great people's theatre;—the stage, that better pulpit, from which ethics are taught by living motions, and not in the dead phraseology of thrice-threshed disquisition. However good a father Lear might have been, he was not a perfect one. Had he, indeed, perfectly loved his children first, they must have reciprocated; but there was a spice of selfishness in his affection, and this was sown also in the bosom of his children, so far as they were images of himself. The echo and response of it was more terrible than an

army with banners—sudden too, as well as terrible. It astonished him, for he had not watched its growth. Originally but as a grain of mustard-seed, while the old man's eyes were dimming, it had expanded into an upas-tree, whose pestiferous presence had made of a nursery-garden of life a valley of the shadow of death.

Coleridge rightly remarks, that of all Shakspere's plays, *Macbeth* is the most rapid, *Hamlet* the slowest in movement. *Lear* combines length with rapidity—like the hurricane and the whirlpool, absorbing while it advances. It begins as a stormy day in summer, with brightness, but that brightness is lurid, and anticipates the tempest. The first four or five lines of the play prognosticate the remainder:

"*Kent.* I thought the king had more affected the Duke of Albany than Cornwall.

Gloster. It did always seem so to us; but now, in the division of the kingdom, it appears not which of the dukes he values most; for equalities are so weighed, that curiosity in neither can make choice of either's moiety."

Thus we find that the division of Lear's kingdom is a thing previously determined in all its particulars irrespective of the subsequent trial of professions, as the relative rewards of which the daughters are to be made to consider their several portions. This, Coleridge points out, is not without forethought or due significance. The strange, yet by no means unnatural mixture of selfishness, sensibility, and habit of feeling derived from, and fostered by, the particular rank and usages of the individual,—the intense desire of being intensely beloved,—selfish, and yet cha-

racteristic of the selfishness of a loving and kindly nature alone; the self-supportless leaning for all pleasure on another's breast; the craving after sympathy with a prodigal disinterestedness, frustrated by its own ostentation and the mode and nature of its claims;—the anxiety, the distrust, the jealousy, which more or less accompany all selfish affections, and are among the surest contradistinctions of mere fondness from true love, and which originate Lear's eager wish to enjoy his daughter's violent professions; whilst the inveterate habits of sovereignty convert the wish into claim and positive right, and an incompliance with it into crime and treason;—these facts, these passions, these moral varieties, on which the whole tragedy is founded, are all prepared for, and will, to the retrospect, be found in the lines above quoted. In the fewest words, and in a natural reply to as natural a question,—which yet answers the secondary purpose of attracting our attention to the difference or diversity between the characters of Cornwall and Albany, —the poet has provided, as it were, the premises and *data* for an after insight into the mind and mood of the person whose character, passions, and sufferings are the main subject-matter of the drama.

The same acute critic also remarks how that from Lear, the *persona patiens* of his play, the poet passes, without delay, to the second in importance, the chief agent and prime mover, and introduces Edmund to our acquaintance, preparing us with the same felicity of judgment, and in the same easy and natural way, for his character in the seemingly casual communi-

cation of its origin and occasion. Nature has been unjust to this fine and handsome youth, first in making him a younger son, and secondly a bastard; so that he has to win his way in opposition to acknowledged rights and without any recognition of his own by others. Here we have paternity—the ruling principle of the dramatic action—under another aspect, where the link between parent and child is impaired by lawlessness, and discoloured by the shade of shame thrown on the otherwise bright steel, arising from the mutual sentiment of father and son. The foolish Gloster had "blushed so often to acknowledge him," though he had got "brazed to it." This he says in his son's hearing, and at the same time depreciates his mother's memory. Fatal words, that passed into Edmund's soul, festering and stimulating to evil motives. But whatever may be the faults of Lear or Gloster, the moral of this sublime drama, conceived and executed in the Grand Style of Art, and itself an example of High Art in its noblest form, is intended to go to this extent, and not to stop short of it in any degree, that filial obligation remains the same, and that the infirmities of age are no excuse for filial disobedience, ingratitude, or indifference. The one fact that we derive our being through our parents should dominate all the others, and allow to their errors a privilege which we rightly deny to our own. There is no excuse either for the illegitimate son of Gloster, or the cruel daughters of Lear. Their conduct is not only impious, but unnatural.

Shakspere had long survived the Instinctive period

of his art, and was now thoroughly a conscious worker. This is confirmed by one remarkable instance in this tragedy, wherein Pity and Terror, the especial elements of the tragic, are urged to their utmost limits. Of course, there was danger of excess. But Shakspere was on his guard. The instance alluded to is the well-known scene where Gloster's eyes are plucked out. The poet might have justified the act by the supposed barbarity of the legendary age whose manners he was tracing, and urged that their familiarity with such acts prevented the actors in them from recognising the horrible. No such thing. "He went round to work." By inserting in the group a servant who *did* recognise its intrinsic horror, and compassionated the sufferer, he converted disgust into pity. The valiant menial revenges on the spot the wrong done to humanity:

> "*Serv.* Hold your hand, my lord!
> I have served you ever since I was a child,
> But better service have I never done you
> Than now to bid you hold.
> *Reg.* How now, you dog!
> *Serv.* If you did wear a beard upon your chin,
> I'd shake it on this quarrel. What do you mean?
> *Corn.* My villain! [*Draws and runs at him.*
> *Serv.* Nay then, come on, and take the chance of anger.
> [*Draws; Cornwall is wounded.*"

The other servants also compassionate the blind old man, and lead him out to help him, to heal his wounds, and to place him in safe custody. The entire current of feeling is turned in the direction of pity, by the force of sympathy. Thus the horror in the "horrid act" is mitigated, and reduced to the

level of terror; which feeling is enforced by "the fearful looking-for" of a coming vengeance, of which an instalment is secured even in the moment of crime. And this sentiment, too, is expressed by the servants, who act as chorus to the scene:

> "1 *Serv.* I'll never care what wickedness I do,
> If this man comes to good.
> 2 *Serv.* If she live long,
> And in the end meet the old course of death,
> Women will all turn monsters."

All this and much more is the most conscious art, and may serve to demonstrate the improbability at any time of Shakspere having been the author of a tragedy of horror. Here we have, as it were, his protest against that abortion of an elder time. And now for the moral which terror admits, but horror would exclude:

> "*Alb.* What news?
> *Mess.* O, my good lord, the Duke of Cornwall's dead;
> Slain by his servant, going to put out
> The other eye of Gloster.
> *Alb.* Gloster's eyes!
> *Mess.* A servant that he bred, thrilled with remorse,
> Opposed against the act, bending his sword
> To his great master; who, thereat enraged,
> Flew on him, and amongst them felled him dead;
> But not without that harmful stroke, which since
> Hath plucked him after.
> *Alb.* This shows you are above,
> You justicers, that these our nether crimes
> So speedily can venge!"

Not a touch wasted. All that taste can afford to mitigate the over-terrible, and also to shed some beauty on it, is here administered with masterly adroitness.

There was another danger to avoid—the monotony of too sublime a strain. Some shadow must be

made to cross and to curb the "excess of light." The sublime must be balanced by a little of the ridiculous, and the latter be so managed as to enhance the pathetic. The scenes in which the Fool appears are fine illustrations of Shaksperian art in this respect. His jests serve to set-off Lear's sorrows, and make the latter more deeply impressive. There is nothing grander in the whole compass of dramatic art. But Shakspere was fully conscious of an artistic purpose, and its necessary result. Nor was he willing to leave it to a chance recognition, but points both out himself:

> "*Kent.* Where's the king?
> *Gent.* Contending with the fretful elements;
> Bids the wind blow the earth into the sea,
> Or swell the curled waters 'bove the main,
> That things might change or cease: tears his white hair,
> Which the impetuous blasts, with eyeless rage,
> Catch in their fury, and make nothing of:
> Strives in his little world of man to outscorn
> The to-and-fro conflicting wind and rain.
> This night, wherein the cub-drawn bear would couch,
> The lion and the belly-pinched wolf
> Keep their fur dry, unbonneted he runs,
> And bids what will take all.
> *Kent.* But who is with him?
> *Gent.* None but the Fool, who labours to outjest
> His heart-strung injuries."

The tragic and the epic elements are curiously blended in this exceedingly complex drama. The persons are of great dignity, whether for good or evil; while the royal and the natural become one in the action. Lear's distresses are independent of his station and public character; they are domestic, and such as might befall the father of an unruly family under any circumstances. They happen to him as a

man, not as a king, and their force depends on the passions awakened, which are here depicted with amazing breadth and depth. It is these which call on the imagination for expression, and give elevation to the sentiments and language of the various speakers. On the whole the dramatic style is preserved; but in the scenes with the Fool the lyric is permitted, and affords relief to the dialogue. Parallel actions, too, have each their distinct scope and range, mutually illustrating each other, and harmonising in one and the same unity. The key-note is repeated in more than one character. Gloster and Edgar suffer like Lear; the one from filial ingratitude, the other in similar exposure to the evils of destitution and the perils of the storm; whereupon follows the imitation of madness which with the uncrowned father is a terrible reality. There is, accordingly, an abundance of business transacted, for which room can only be gained by compression, and the concisest severity of diction. The skill in grouping events and characters in this tragedy is altogether of a marvellous sort; common neither in kind nor in degree. If we trace back its various displays in the series of dramas already examined, we shall find it an *acquired* power. Such a grasp of manifold materials is the result of practice, discipline, and preparatory exercise. All culminated in this powerful tragedy, which, in structure, is, in my opinion, the most perfect, as the most complicated, in the history of literature. In it all is colossal, massive, rude, surging with violent emotion, teeming with monsters like the great sea, lawless in appearance,

but really obedient to the creative Law which called them and it into separate and collective existence. Lear himself is the image of his epoch; primitive, passionate, lacking culture, with sublime instincts but no self-control, gigantic strength, deficient in knowledge, but capable of immense sufferings; and these as much owing to the incomplete development of the time as of his own character. This, in fact, is the passive side of his individuality, where his fate grows irresistibly oppressive, and drives him into the tragic arena, to become there a moral spectacle for gods and men. Similarly subject to destiny are the other persons of the drama, whose crimes and virtues alike symbolise an iron age, of whose ruggedness they are necessarily products and partakers. And such consideration reconciles us to their acts, violent as these be, and persuades us to pity even the wicked, whose guilt is, in great part, the result of necessity.

The next tragedy composed by Shakspere was *Troilus and Cressida*, written probably about 1605, and twice printed in 1609. We see in this the same great elements seething as in *Lear*, and indeed the tragedy itself was the natural corollary of the latter. Geoffrey of Monmouth refers the kings of the line to which Lear belongs to the Trojan Brutus, and in this way the subject of *Lear*, though placed on British ground, is classical, and led in the most direct manner to that of *Troilus and Cressida*. Shakspere appears to have resorted for his authority to Caxton's *Recuyel of the Histories of Troy*, and Chaucer's *Booke of Troilus and Creseide*. Like *Lear*, *Troilus and Cres-*

sida is a legendary drama, and as such is distinguished by Coleridge from the proper ancient histories of Greece and Rome, as represented in Shakspere's later plays. The drama itself is another attempt at compressing the epic into the tragic, and the persons of it are all placed on that high level which those of *Lear* also occupy. Rightly Coleridge opines that the poet's ruling impulse was to translate the poetic heroes of paganism into the not less rude but more intellectually vigorous, and more *featurely*, warriors of Christian chivalry,—and to substantiate the distinct and graceful profiles or outlines of the Homeric epic in the flesh-and-blood of the romantic drama,—in short, to give a grand history-piece in the robust style of Albert Durer. The action to which the title of the drama refers is thrown into the background by the masterly group of heroes whose portraits are no less distinctly drawn than those of Troilus and Cressida themselves. Hector, Agamemnon, Nestor, Ulysses, Achilles, Ajax, Thersites, are each and all magnificently delineated — form and colouring alike admirable. Difficult as it was to maintain in company with these the importance of Troilus and his faithless mistress, Shakspere has so nicely traced out their peculiar qualities, that they are among the most living pictures that his pencil ever drew. But the great charm of the drama lies in the philosophical maxims with which it abounds, and the richly eloquent language whereby they are supported. Nevertheless, according to the taste of the time, however much transcended by Shakspere,

the story of the lovers was amongst the most popular of arguments whether for poem or romance. The faithfulness of Troilus, and the infidelity of Cressida, were proverbial in Chaucer's day, and the name of Pandarus has come down to our own as a specific designation. Shakspere has dealt with these features of the old story both psychologically and comically, and in portraying the last-named character has exhausted a world of ingenuity and skill. As to Troilus, he makes him a marvel of innocency:

> "As true as truth's simplicity,
> And simpler than the infancy of truth."

The crafty wanton who deceives him is aptly described by Ulysses:

> "There's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip,
> Nay, her foot speaks; her wanton spirits look out
> At every joint and motive of her body."

What a contrast! The coquette and her dupe are strangely distinguished. Then we have Diomedes, no less cunningly delineated, who knows better than Troilus how to deal with a light meretricious woman. And now it happens with this play, as it had chanced with the comedy of *Much Ado about Nothing;* the originally intended subject of the production sinks into an episode, while the accessories take the lead in the action, and are treated at greater length and with greater force of handling.

This drama, fine as it is, is not for all readers. Shakspere had not written it for the public but for himself. We may now begin to note that independence in him which is observable of many great artists.

Wearied with popular applause and the commendation of inferior minds, the painter no longer executes pictures for the multitude, but for his compeers in the art, and for the satisfaction of his own taste. It has been said of Shelley that he was the Poet's poet. The saying is true of Shakspere in regard to his epic tragedies of *Lear* and *Troilus and Cressida*. They are written for poets, and by them will be rightly appreciated; by the vulgar they will be misunderstood and decried. The poet, in his upward flight, is already leaving his meaner fellows behind him, and becoming less and less popular. Henceforward he is for an audience fit though few; perhaps for none. His poems now are self-communings. Nothing but his Inner Life may appear in them.

Shakspere, in the conception of this drama, projected his mind to an extraordinary elevation. The view he took of characters and events was that of a transcendentalist. Coleridge notes the same mental assumption in his treatment of the subject of *Venus and Adonis*, which poem he regards as peculiarly illustrative of Shakspere. "There are," he says, "men who can write passages of deepest pathos and even sublimity on circumstances personal to themselves and stimulative of their own passions; but they are not, therefore, on this account poets. Read that magnificent burst of woman's patriotism and exultation, Deborah's song of victory; it is glorious, but nature is the poet there. It is quite another matter to become all things and yet remain the same,—to make the changeful God be felt in the river, the lion,

and the flame; this it is that is the true imagination. Shakspere writes in this poem as if he were of another planet, charming you to gaze on the movements of Venus and Adonis, as you would on the twinkling dances of two butterflies." The remark is much more applicable to his treatment of the loves of Troilus and Cressida. The loves of the Gods are not the loves of mortals, and those of Venus and Adonis pertain to the former. To them the laws of morality are as nothing; it is their will, indeed, that makes laws, to which laws it is in no wise subject; and love with them is simply voluntary association. Shakspere having thus treated of the divine affections as above all possible convention, and seated himself among deities as one of them, to observe and celebrate their doings, had next traced the working of the same principles in human relations. The loves of mortal lovers, of husband and wife, of parents and children, as these display themselves in established society, he had already celebrated. The last, also, he had in *Lear* shown as they rudely shape themselves in an inchoate state, in as it were an ante-conventional period. The people of Britain, as refugees from Troy, form as yet but an unsettled colony. Milton, in his admirable history of England, copying as he tells us in the interests of poets, Geoffrey of Monmouth's Chronicle, recognises this; showing that even up to the time of Mulmutius, long after that of King Lear, little had been done for civilisation. "Dunwallo," he writes, "was the first in Britain that wore a crown of gold, and therefore by some reputed the first king. He

established the Mulmutine laws among the English to this day; written long after in Latin by Gildas, and in Saxon by King Alfred: so saith Geoffrey; but Gildas denies to have known aught of the Britons before Cæsar, much less knew Alfred. These laws, whoever made them, bestowed on temples the privilege of sanctuary; to cities also, and the ways thither leading, yea, to ploughs, granted a kind of like refuge; and made such riddance of thieves and robbers that all passages were safe." None of these conventions were established in the time of Lear; hence its apparent lawlessness. But in reverting to the subject of the Trojan war, Shakspere recognises convention as established, a breach of which relative to the institution of marriage was the cause of contention. Much of the discoursing of the Greek chiefs turns on political themes—such as the necessity of order in society, and a scale of rank, and the duty of individuals to maintain their station. The poet, as it were, presides at the celebration of the Birth of Convention, at the Institution of Manners, and in the court where these are enforced. Love, however, had broken down these barriers, and assumed an illicit ascendancy—in the case of Paris by violating the ordonnance of marriage, and in that of Troïlus by evading it altogether. This is the Idea in the poet's mind, and his treatment of the subject its more or less adequate expression. To the idea and to the subject, as in *Measure for Measure*, objection may be taken by shallow critics, or even by some sufficiently profound yet under a bias; the poet, however, met naturally with both in the way which

his mental growth and development were taking, and fearlessly and faithfully vindicated the right of his genius to deal with both by demonstrating his power to bring them into subjection to the purposes of art, and to the mission which he now felt appertained to him as a teacher of men through the forms of the drama.

In none of his plays has Shakspere pitched the tone of the dialogue so high as in this, or invested it with diction so gorgeous and thoughts so abstract. It appears as if it were addressed wholly to sages and statesmen. He prefixes to it a magniloquent Prologue, to be delivered by a speaker in armour, proposing in epic fashion the argument, and its limits, which prologue revels in lofty phrases and sonorous verse. The quarrel between Greeks and Trojans is fairly set forth, and war is imminent:

> "Now expectation, tickling skittish spirits,
> On one and other side, Trojan and Greek,
> Sets all on hazard."
> "Our play
> Leaps o'er the vaunt and firstlings of those broils,
> Beginning in the middle, starting thence away
> To what may be digested in a play."

These epical conditions being settled, the drama opens with Troilus and Pandarus, the former love-sick, and on the verge of forsaking duty for passion:

> "Call here my varlet; I'll unarm again:
> Why should I war without the walls of Troy,
> That find such cruel battle here within?
> Each Trojan that is master of his heart,
> Let him to field; Troilus, alas! hath none."

Illicit love ranges at will in the family of Priam,

and threatens the destruction of his house. See with what affluence of language Troilus describes the agitation of his heart:

> "The Greeks are strong, and skilful to their strength,
> Fierce to their skill, and to their fierceness valiant;
> But I am weaker than a woman's tear,
> Tamer than sleep, fonder than ignorance,
> Less valiant than the virgin in the night,
> And skilless as unpractised infancy."

Troilus is as passionate as Romeo. But the latter was seeking a wife, the former a mistress; one within the bounds of law, the other beyond them. Romeo's is a justifiable love, Troilus's not so; and the poet sharply draws the distinction. With Paris it is "an *ulcer* of the heart." The Cressida whom he loves is false to his country already. Her father has gone over to the Greeks, and she is destined to follow. And what then? Would Troilus love her less? Not he; for he is almost himself made a traitor to patriotism by his immoral wishes. He cares no more for Trojans than Greeks:

> "Fools on both sides! Helen must needs be fair,
> When with your blood you daily paint her thus.
> I cannot fight upon this argument;
> It is too starved a subject for my sword."

For Cressida, he deludes himself into the opinion that "she is stubborn-chaste." All that belongs to her is, in the extravagance of his passion, esteemed rich:

> "Her bed is India; there she lies, a pearl:
> Between our Ilium and where she resides,
> Let it be called the wild and wandering flood,
> Ourself the merchant, and this sailing Pandar
> Our doubtful hope, our convoy, and our bark."

He does not, or will not, see the artifices and tricks of Pandarus, and so surrenders himself to deception. The poet also would appear to wish that the audience should on her first appearance be similarly deceived as to Cressida's real character. She enters with her servant Alexander, who throughout the colloquy speaks choicest poetry, describing Queen Hecuba, Helen, Andromache, Hector, and Ajax. As yet she has no preference for Troilus, and unfeignedly admires Hector for his valour and other good qualities. She has not yet fallen, and needs Pandarus' solicitations in order to do so. The scene that ensues between her and her tempter is an exquisite piece of dramatic writing. The fiend proceeds by suggestion, wrapped up in a frivolous tale about the hairs on Troilus' chin, and Helen's having noticed them, which, though nothing in itself, has a corrupting tendency. The insidious poison operates too surely. He fills the poor girl's ears with Troilus—Troilus—nothing but Troilus, until she begins to think that there must be something in the youth of whom so much is spoken. But still she is on her guard, and will not be won too easily; for,

> "Achieved, men still command; ungained, beseech."

To this frivolous conversation succeeds the council of the chiefs in the Grecian camp. Agamemnon, Nestor, Ulysses, Menelaus, orate in turn in long ornate speeches full of wisdom. As an example, take a part of Ulysses' oration:

> "O, when degree is shaked,
> Which is the ladder to all high designs,

Then enterprise is sick! How could communities,
Degrees in schools, and brotherhoods in cities,
Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,
The primogenitive and due of birth,
Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,
But by degree stand in authentic place?
Take but degree away, untune that string,
And, hark, what discord follows! each thing meets
In mere oppugnancy: the bounded waters
Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores,
And make a sop of all this solid globe:
Strength should be lord of imbecility,
And the rude son should strike his father dead:
Force should be right; or rather, right and wrong
(Between whose endless jar justice resides)
Should lose their names, and so should justice too."

The dialogue of the drama overflows with these conservative sentiments. Shakspere had survived a period of revolution, and witnessed attempts at reaction, which he discouraged, because he perceived that the most beneficial revolution must needs be fruitless, unless authority and order be reconstituted to secure its results. The sincere advocate of the Reformation, he addresses the reactionists of his day as he had made the Earl of Westmoreland on behalf of Henry IV. address the rebellious Archbishop of York; and as we should now address the clerical recusants who are discontented with the judgment of the Privy Council. The wise and prudent respectfully request of all such to yield to the Logic of Facts. Thus it is that in the regular course of the argument which habitually occupied the mind of Shakspere, he came now to the point of commending the sacredness of institutions and the authority of conventions established in the interest of order. We find him here, as else-

where, accordingly the honest champion of marriage and the enlightened enemy to celibacy; holding the balance even between the rightful claims of nature, and the presumptuous assertions of an exclusive spiritualism. And thus we find a harmony existing in the various stages of the poet's development, by reason of a law within him, which enforced a particular direction on the workings of his fertile mind.

I recognise in this drama, therefore, a serious work of the poet, and not a mere farce, parody, or burlesque of Homer. What appears to be such to some minds arises partly from their own associations, and partly from the circumstance that the classical action of the play is romantically treated. Doubtless Shakspere had Lydgate and Homer before him, as well as Chaucer and Caxton;—but as he held aloof equally from all, it is evident that he regarded all alike from a superior point of view, and looked down on the shadow-valley of ruder ages from the higher alps of his own. While, however, he sported poetically with the subject, and threw over it an original colouring, he had a stern purpose for which the work was undertaken and by which it was regulated. So much homage he pays to Homer, as that he limits the action within the same bounds as those of the *Iliad*, beginning with Achilles' seclusion, and ending with Hector's death. Chapman's translation was probably his guide, whom he followed in aiming at a more exact or more dramatic discrimination of the characters than Homer had attempted. That of Thersites was, in this way, most elaborately brought

out; and it is evident that he is likewise employed in the manner of a Chorus, as such speaking the poet's judgment (under a veil as usual) both on the matter and moral of the general action.

Homer's view of this character is not exactly that of more advanced ages. He seems to have thought his heroes justified in inflicting punishment on the poor bastard Thersites, because of his inferior rank, his deformity, and his insolence. We now permit to the satirist, however crooked in mind or body, more license. We seek not to suppress *Punch*, because he may have been malignant; nor do we discourage the lower classes from uttering their complaints; but the contrary, that we may both know and remove the causes of discontent. We find that Shakspere from the first opposes the wit of Thersites to the brute strength of his oppressors. "O thou great thunder-darter of Olympus!" exclaims the deformed sufferer, "forget that thou art Jove, the king of gods; and, Mercury, lose all the serpentine craft of thy caduceus, if ye take not that little, little, less than little wit from them that they have; which short-armed ignorance itself knows is so abundant scarce, it will not in circumvention deliver a fly from a spider, without drawing their massy irons and cutting the web." On Patroclus demanding, "Art thou devout? Wast thou in prayer?" Thersites answers, "Ay; *the heavens hear me!*" Achilles is more generous than the rest of the chiefs, and defends the hunchback jester from the violence of Ajax. Yet Thersites makes but little distinction between them, and says to his pro-

tector, "A great deal of your wit, too, lies in your sinews, or else there be liars. Hector shall have a great catch, if he knock out either of your brains; he were as good crack a fusty nut with no kernel." The case between himself and Ajax he thus states: "He beats me, and I rail at him: O worthy satisfaction! would it were otherwise; that I could beat him, whilst he railed at me!" There has always been a more or less numerous class to whom both nature and society have been unjust; born in a low sphere, and uncouth to the sight. Nevertheless, these are human beings, with immortal souls, and have their rights as well as their duties. Many of them, too, have great sagacity of mind, and a strong desire, like Thersites, to exchange places with the more fortunate. In modern times they are permitted to do so, and frequently by their intellectual qualifications win a higher station than the better-born and the better-shaped. Accept Thersites as their representative, and you have Shakspere's idea of this man of bitter words—a very different one from that of Homer. The very hopelessness of his position, in the heroic age, increased and justified the bitterness of his language.

It was with a thorough consciousness that Shakspere worked at his theme in this manner; indeed, the instance may serve in part proof of the general consciousness with which he worked. It was not his cue to throw himself into the Homeric age; but, in order to point the moral lesson, to bring up that age to the level of his own. There is more of reflection

in Shakspere's poem—more of sensation in Homer's. The former, however, in our great poet's estimate, is essential to the perfection of human character. The want of it he paints in the example of Ajax—"a very horse, that has he knows not what." In contrast with him, he paints Ulysses as a self-conscious man, gifted with genius and fluent speech, whose florid eloquence gives to his thoughts their brightest lustre, and decks them in the loveliest hues. What a marvellous colloquy is that which he maintains with Achilles, in which the classic and romantic blend in the happiest union; *that* furnishing the perfection of form, *this* the warmth and radiance of expressive colour! Passages of it are instinct with a glorious inspiration. *E. g.*

> "The providence that's in a watchful state
> Knows almost every grain of Plutus' gold,
> Finds bottom in the uncomprehensive deeps,
> Keeps pace with thought, and almost, like the gods,
> Does thoughts unveil in their dumb crudities.
> There is a mystery (with whom relation
> Durst never meddle) in the soul of state;
> Which hath an operation more divine
> Than breath, or pen, can give expressure to."

Such a passage as this might have been written by Lord Bacon. And in this play there is a curious instance of agreement between Bacon and Shakspere, both of them having committed the same error, probably by referring to the same author—in citing a maxim from Aristotle. Hector is made thus to reprove Paris and Troilus:

> "You have both said well,
> And on the cause and question now in hand
> Have glozed—but superficially; not much
> Unlike young men, whom Aristotle thought
> Unfit to hear moral philosophy."

Now, Aristotle did not say "moral philosophy," but "political;" and it is certainly curious, if not strange, that Bacon and Shakspere should both have made the same mistake. Suffice it that the poet has placed himself on the same level with the chancellor as a philosophical genius—or rather, fully to express my own opinion, on a higher level; for on many points Shakspere has even anticipated Kant and Hegel. For the anachronism contained in the example, poetry has a privilege. Fancy being memory absolved from the law of time, the poet has no proper concern with chronology. In the products that are eternal, the present is the identity of the past and the future. In *Lear*, Shakspere has asserted his claim to the privilege. Thus the Fool says:

"This prophecy Merlin shall make, for I live *before his time*."—Act iii. sc. 2.

Such an example may serve to show that it was not from unconscious negligence that the apparent fault, in this and other places, was committed. It cannot be too frequently repeated, that in all things, the smallest as the greatest, Shakspere *knew* what he was about. There are no faults nor foibles in his works. They are all perfect, immaculate, and outsoar the objections of the criticaster.

But Thersites is not the only thinker who judges coarsely of the origin and motive of the Trojan war; he is shared in his opinion by Diomedes, who speaks as scurvily of Helen and Menelaus and Paris. He speaks bitterly, because he has bitter cause, and especially of the wanton Helen:

> "Since she could speak,
> She hath not given so many good words breath
> As for her Greeks and Trojans suffered death."

The fact is, that Shakspere is no squeamish fashionable poet, but an honest outspoken man, who treats adultery as adultery, and covers it with his scorn and indignation. He is not a sentimentalist, like Kotzebue, who would reconcile the lost wife to the wronged husband; but cherishes alike the utmost contempt for the seducer, the wittol, and the harlot. On these points, he admits of no compromise; for though the enemy of celibacy, Shakspere is the apostle of marriage. On these matters he thinks and feels like an English Protestant, and not with the indecision of foreign liberals. In like manner he refuses to gild Cressida's conduct, but shows sin in her as sin, that the spectator may receive from it no encouragement to vice, but, by witnessing it in its true colours, conceive a due disgust. Ulysses, in all this, speaks the mind of Shakspere. Besides, therein also we must keep in mind the poet's intention. He had, in particular, to represent in this play "the primitive statue and oblique memorial" of each form of heroism impersonated in it. The characters are all moulds of the antique world, and all the victims of lust and strife, which, according to Greek moralists, are the motive-springs of worldly action. Shakspere could not celebrate their doings in the spirit of a contemporary poet; nor did he attempt it. He regarded them, we repeat, from the heights of a more developed intelligence; and with a smile of superiority on his conscious cheek, enjoyed the sport in the

battle-valley below, where brute men, who esteemed themselves little less than gods, proved themselves to be mortal by slaying each other. Of these self-willed heroes, the poet, though tolerably impartial on the whole, gives the preference to the Trojans, perhaps from a national and patriotic feeling, as having been, according to the legendary beliefs of our country, embodied even in Acts of Parliament, the progenitors of that Brutus from whom the Britons were derived. They are represented, notwithstanding the fault of Paris, to be more generous, more honest and honourable, more pious and clement than their antagonists, the wily and circumventing Greeks. For this reason the style of the play is critical and psychological; but the occasional humorous air which it assumes is specially due to the characters having become excessively individualised. The Homeric epos generalises, the Shaksperian drama particularises; and this difference of treatment makes of itself more than half the difference of effect. Moreover, the spirit of the epic is never intensely tragic; and this negative spirit, combined with the positive vein of the drama, harmonises in the semi-comic result of the piece as a work of art.

We now come to the drama of *Cymbeline*, which appears to have been first acted in 1610. Shakspere took the plot of it from a translation of one of Boccaccio's tales, and the historic data with which he has connected the story from Holinshed, whose narrative he sometimes alters. In fact, Shakspere has added greatly to the meagre chronicle, as well as creditably

to his inventive powers. This play likewise is written in honour of marriage, and in vindication of womanly innocence. The theme haunted Shakspere like a spell, and urged him to its exhaustion. We have evidence, too, in this play, of Shakspere's having come fresh from that of *Troilus and Cressida*. In the fourth act, the headless trunk of Cloten and the supposed dead body of the senseless Imogen are laid together, with the remark, that

> "Thersites' body is as good as Ajax
> When neither is alive."

This play is a remarkable example of Shakspere's complex structure and the conventional tendency of his mind at this period. It is also a tragic epos, and remarkable for its poetic beauty. Without being so rich in style as the preceding drama, it is more natural, and is exceedingly pathetic. The action, however, belongs to heathen times, and thus coalesces with the two previous dramas under this section; nevertheless, the period is more civilised than that of either of the two former plays. This work ranks very high in our esteem as an artistic product. Gervinus rightly says, that we have only to examine its several parts according to their internal nature, and to refer to the motives, and we shall see at once persons and actions forming themselves, like crystals, into a fixed figure; we shall catch the idea which links them together, and comparing the idea and mode of carrying it out, we shall arrive at clearer views, and perceive a work of art whose compass widens and whose background deepens in such a

manner, that we can only compare it with the most excellent of all that Shakspere has produced.

In preparing a large canvas for the reception of a multitude of figures or a series of events, Shakspere had to project a wide and deep foreground for the introduction of the principal characters. Accordingly, in the dramas treated of in this section, the first acts are almost separate plays. Four scenes full of various matter compose the first act of *Lear*, in which are enacted the division of the kingdom; the repudiation of Cordelia; the banishment of Kent; the conspiracy of Edmund the bastard against Edgar the legitimate; the insolence of Goneril's creature Oswald towards the King; the introduction of the Fool; the father's awful curse, and his indignant departure from the court of his impious daughter. In *Troilus and Cressida*, also, the first act consists of three elaborate scenes, in which are represented the rash love of Troilus, and the intervention of Pandarus, with his suggestions to Cressida; the grand council in the Grecian camp; Hector's challenge, and the plot of Ulysses to call forth Achilles from his seclusion, by setting-up Ajax as their champion. In *Cymbeline* we have as many as seven scenes, passing from one month to another, and from one country to another. The first is merely formal—a prologue, in fact, in which two gentlemen describe the virtues of Posthumus Leonatus, who had been brought up in King Cymbeline's court, and had married his daughter without his consent. This play accordingly treats of filial obligation as well as of marital relations, and

thus includes a further statement of the argument in the two preceding plays. We have then the hypocritical interference of the Queen, with the malediction of the King, which, like a Hebrew outpouring of prophetic inspiration, means a curse or a blessing just according to the context. Gervinus points out the difference between this and Lear's curse, and shows that the following utterance is equivocal:

> "Let her languish
> A drop of blood a day; and, being aged,
> Die of this folly—"

Which actually happens to her in a fortunate sense; for though in the first instance she suffers for her love, in the end she is rewarded with a permanent felicity. The action then proceeds to show Cloten's cowardly attack on Posthumus, and the departure of the latter from England. In the next scene we find him at Rome, and in company with Iachimo and others, where he is taunted into a wager concerning his wife's fidelity. We then return to England, and are introduced to the machinations of the cruel Queen, who bargains for poisons with Cornelius, and gives them to Posthumus' servant as cordials. By this time Iachimo has arrived in England, ingratiated himself with Imogen, and induced her to admit his trunk of supposed jewelry into her bedchamber. Thus an entire cycle of events is included in the first act.

Cymbeline does not, like Lear, entertain a fool in his court; but Cloten, his Queen's son, is such a natural, that he is every one's butt. Shakspere's pro-

fessional fools are philosophers in disguise; but this foolish prince is a clown in royal attire. We make further acquaintance with him in the second act, and also with Iachimo, who emerges from his trunk in Imogen's bedchamber while the lady sleeps, takes note of her surroundings, as also of the cinque-spotted mole on her left breast, and steals from her wrist a bracelet. Imogen, on rising in the morning, finds she has been serenaded by Cloten, and reproves him for taking so much profitless trouble. We are then again transported to Rome, where Iachimo joins Posthumus, and compels him to believe in his wife's infidelity; the infuriate husband resolves on revenge.

The third act returns us to Britain, where we find the Roman general at the court of Cymbeline demanding from him the neglected tribute, which Cloten, fool as he may be, is brave enough to refuse. "If," says the inspired, because patriotic, idiot, "Cæsar can hide the sun from us with a blanket, or put the moon in his pocket, we will pay him tribute for light; else, sir, no more tribute, pray you now." Cymbeline is equally decided not to yield, and in his speech refers to Dunwallo, mentioned above, as founder of the laws:

> "Say, then, to Cæsar,
> Our ancestor was that Mulmutius which
> Ordained our laws, whose use the sword of Cæsar
> Hath too much mangled; whose repair and franchise
> Shall, by the power we hold, be our good deed,
> Though Rome be therefore angry. Mulmutius made our laws,
> Who was the first of Britain which did put
> His brows within a golden crown and called himself a king."

And thus Shakspere exhausts the literature on the

subject while working on it. Who be they who wish us to consider Shakspere an ignorant poet—a mere conduit-pipe of inspiration—or, at best, one who achieves excellence by instinct, rather than by conscious art? Ben Jonson knew the fact better:

> "Yet must I not give Nature all; thy art,
> My gentle Shakspere, must enjoy a part;
> For though the poet's matter nature be,
> His art doth give the fashion . . . .
> For a good poet's made as well as born;
> And such wert thou."

By this time Pisanio has received a letter from his master, instructing him to punish his supposed guilty mistress with death. Poor Imogen also receives a brief note requesting her to meet Posthumus at Milford Haven; and is impatient to obey. And this leads us to Wales, where we meet with the King's long-lost sons, Guiderius and Arviragus, disguised under the names of Polydore and Cadwal, in company with Belarius, under the name of Morgan; with whom an entirely new interest commences. Arrived near Milford Haven, Pisanio reveals to Imogen the real purpose of his master. And here we may note again that his last play is still running in the poet's mind. Imogen, so much unlike Helen and Cressida, still refers to the story in which they played the shameless heroines. Pisanio wishes her to hear him—to which she replies:

> "True honest men being heard, like false Æneas,
> Were in his time thought false; and Sinon's weeping
> Did scandal many a holy tear, took pity
> From most true wretchedness."

The incidents alluded to in this speech were not

included in the play of *Troilus and Cressida*, as they might have been, if the poet had thought fit to supplement Homer's account with Virgil's additions. But it was not from ignorance that they found no place in his draught. They were excluded by his judgment, not his want of knowledge. There is also a religious reference in Imogen's speeches productive of reflection:

> "Why, I must die;
> And if I do not by thy hand, thou art
> No servant of thy master's. Against self-slaughter
> There is a prohibition so divine
> That cravens my weak hand. Come, here's my heart:
> Something's afore 't:—Soft, soft! we'll no defence;
> Obedient as the scabbard. What is here?
> The *scriptures* of the loyal Leonatus,
> All turned to heresy? Away, away,
> Corrupters of my faith! you shall no more
> Be stomachers to my heart. Thus may poor fools
> Believe false teachers: though those that are betrayed
> Do feel the treason sharply, yet the traitor
> Stands in worse case of woe."

Shakspere had already registered the same sentiment against suicide in almost the same terms in his Hamlet:

> "O, that this too, too solid flesh would melt,
> Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!
> Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
> His canon 'gainst self-slaughter."

Where did Shakspere find this "canon"? not in the "scriptures" to which Imogen afterwards alludes, for they have no special prohibition of such a crime; and the Hebrew annals, like the Roman, contain many instances of self-sacrifice. The curious use made of those "scriptures" as a simile might, again, be almost taken as a testimony against the reformers in favour

of the claims of the Catholic Church to set her authority above the written word. It may be, that in reconstituting convention and authority Shakspere went as far as this; and if he did, he certainly had the opinion of the court (King James's) to corroborate his judgment. An advocate of the Reformation, a critical reader of the Bible, and an *extreme* Protestant, in Shakspere's mind the circle was completed which restored to the Reformed Church the principle of Catholicism; and he thus was no more enslaved to the letter of documents than he was to the sovereignty of the Bishop of Rome. He would no more admit a paper Pope than he would a personal one. And thus in theology as well as in philosophy, this wonderful man anticipated those rational opinions which are only now beginning to force themselves on the general mind, though long cherished by thinkers to whom free thought was an indispensable condition.

But we must return to our story. Pisanio, instead of killing his mistress, gives her good counsel; which taking, she resolves to join the Roman forces in the habit of a page. She finds her way to the cave of Belarius, where the two boys meet with her, and accept her as their foster-brother. And thus, in the third act, a second cycle of action is concluded, as comprised in the second and third. The same order is observed in *Lear* and in *Troilus and Cressida*. In the former the guilt of the sisters is complete in tearing out Gloster's eyes, and in the latter the term expires of Achilles' seclusion, the artifice of Ulysses to awaken his self-esteem having proved effectual.

With the fourth act a new cycle commences; which being ended, the drama ends; thus forming a trilogy. This method had now become familiar to the poet, and operated as an influential law in the arrangement of the matter of his plays. Cloten, misled by Pisanio, follows to Milford Haven; but Imogen is still in Belarius' cave, where, feeling sick, she drinks of the opiate which the benevolent physician had furnished to the Queen instead of poison, and which her majesty had given to Pisanio, through whom it reached the hands of Imogen. Her sleep is supposed to be death. We have already referred to the circumstance of Cloten's folly leading to the loss of his head, and how the dead corse of the foolish youth was placed beside the senseless lady. Imogen, awaking, is at first frightened by her position, and indeed thinks that the body of Cloten is that of Posthumus, being dressed in the clothes of the latter. But she meets with the Roman general and his forces, and is thus able to fulfil her original intention of following the army to Rome. Belarius and the two boys do the same. In Britain, there are further issues. The Queen, having lost her son, becomes desperate, goes mad, and perishes.

And now the fifth act commences with Posthumus suffering much contrition for the supposed murder of Imogen, and by way of expiation taking the garb of a British peasant to fight in behalf of his country. Thus disguised he meets with Iachimo in the Roman army, attacks, subdues, and disarms him. In the course of the fight Cymbeline is taken, but is rescued by Be-

larius and his two unknown sons, they being aided again by Posthumus. Imogen is advised by the general to save herself by flight:

> "It is a day turned strangely; or betimes
> Let's re-inforce, or fly."

In a subsequent scene Posthumus gives a fine description of the battle, and then surrenders himself as a Roman; so that we meet with him in prison, where he has a comforting vision, and finds a book full of good promise to him; after which he is sent for by the King. The vision contains a hint, which Shakspere subsequently improved upon in his *Macbeth*, as to the particulars of Macduff's birth, that of Posthumus being in the same manner. It is common with the poet that earlier works contain the germs of the later; to trace these is proximately to fix the order of their production. Hitherto the evidence thus derived from the Inner Life of the plays has accorded with the chronological succession, so far as that could be ascertained from external records; and the same is also the case with the present drama. In the conversation with the Jailer, comic as it is intended to be, a serious purpose is included, and Shakspere takes occasion to make Posthumus express his own conviction that for the immortality of the soul the wise have sufficient proof, however the case may be with the vulgar. The last, of course, are represented by the jailer, who says to Posthumus, whom he thinks he is leading forth to execution:

"Indeed, sir, he that sleeps feels not the tooth-ache; but a man that were to sleep your sleep, and a hangman to help him to bed, I

think he would change places with his officer; for, look you, sir, you know not which way you shall go."

To which Posthumus replies:

"Yes, indeed I do, fellow.

Jail. Your death has eyes in's head then; I have not seen him so pictured: you must either be directed by some that take upon them to know, or take upon yourself that which I am sure you do not know, or jump* the after-inquiry on your own peril: and how you shall speed in your journey's end, I think you'll never return to tell one.

Post. I tell thee, fellow, *there are none want eyes to direct them the way I am going, but such as wink and will not use them.*"

And now Posthumus stands before the King; there, too, are Belarius and the two royal boys, with Iachimo and Imogen. Lucius, the captive general, commends the supposed page to mercy. And this conducts naturally to poor Imogen's calling Iachimo to account; whereupon the subtle Italian confesses his villany, and Posthumus, casting off all reserve, at once confronts him. Full revelation is now rendered of all particulars, and the virtuous are made happy, with such pathetic circumstance that the eye of reader or spectator swims in tears of joy as the catastrophe approaches.

That a drama so nobly conceived, so beautifully executed, and so admirably constructed, should have been represented by Dr. Johnson as foolish in its fiction, impossible in its events, and absurd in its conduct, so that the faults of the drama are "too evident for detection, and too gross for aggravation," is enough to make us feel an irreverence for the honoured name of our admired moralist. That a judgment so acute

* This phrase curiously coincides with that in *Macbeth*, "jump the life to come."

should be so thoroughly in the wrong and so frequently, when reviewing the works of our great minstrels, is only to be explained by the law that to be an accurate critic on the poet and the dramatist requires a specific taste. Dr. Johnson's mind was too cumbrous for the delicate appreciations implied in the task that he assumed, and his style too ponderous for their expression. He could dispose of the question as to the classical unities sensibly enough; but he could not enter into the elegant niceties involved in Shakspere's psychological treatment of his themes.

Shakspere now revels in the power which he had acquired over the complex form of structure in the drama; and determined to accomplish a triumph in this kind, which he realised in his next work, *The Winter's Tale.* This new work is also conceived in honour of woman, and, like *Othello* and *Cymbeline*, to the exposure of the folly of jealousy in man. That fatal passion he now elects to paint as the natural fault of the individual, not as superinduced upon his character. Leontes is a repetition of Ford, but tragically depicted. Nevertheless, the comic element is not altogether eliminated; for serious as the malady is, the cause being imaginary, the audience always join with Paulina in her laugh against the King. But, as in the preceding play, the poetic element is supreme, and mitigates both the tragic and the comic, subduing both by beauty and the sweet influences of imagination. Here, too, we have the same idea dominant, that of Fidelity, and particularly exemplified in woman. It is in all these plays as if

Shakspere had said: Have no fear of marriage; woman's falsehood is a fable, her truth a proved fact; the holy estate of matrimony insures its existence: it is only the single who meet with false women; it is, indeed, the celibate who makes them. Marriage renders all women honest; and, were it universal, would preserve them so.

Shakspere's plan in this play was, however, not in his usual *discrete* style, but in the concrete manner of a nursery-tale, in which events are not disposed in parallel lines, but succeed as apparently the causes and effects of one another. According to his wont, Shakspere is careful to indicate his purpose by the mouth of one of his characters in an apparently cursory remark thrown in for the sake of the judicious critic. A gentleman who had witnessed "the opening of the fardel" is thus made to report the issue: "The Oracle is fulfilled, the King's daughter is found: *such a deal of wonder is broken out within this hour, that ballad-makers cannot be able to express it.*" Subsequently he asks Paulina's steward, what had become of Antigonus, and the latter answers: "*Like an old tale still, which will have matter to rehearse, though credit be asleep, and not an ear open.*" The old tale or the ballad, therefore, is the model on which this play was written, and to which accordingly Shakspere gave the appropriate title of *A Winter's Tale;* such a tale as one might tell by the fireside on Christmas-eve to neighbours and friends and children, to amuse the time by exciting the listeners' wonder.

Among the characters of the drama, also, Shak-

spere presents us with a ballad-monger, Autolycus, who, in the description of his stores, specifies some of the tales which, carrying the principle of composition to the ultimates,—that is, to vulgar sensible intuitions,—were, in his opinion, likely to become popular, and are therefore mentioned as the most salient, or salacious, specimens of the contents of his travelling basket. Duly considering this, we are driven to conclude that the character of Autolycus is necessarily contained in the original idea of the composition.

Like many an old ballad, the drama divides itself into two parts, which, by a consummate stroke of art, the poet has most skilfully united. The last scene of the third act not only concludes the action of the first three, but commences that of the remaining two, thus reminding us of those subtle lines of demarcation in the kingdom of nature which make it so difficult for the savant to determine where one series ends and another begins in the progress of development. Though many years elapse between the third and fourth acts, by means of the simple artifice adopted, there is no apparent gap of time. We meet again with the Shepherd and his son, and these serve for the reconciling links between the two actions, which are thus identified in the unity of one and the same drama.

The drama itself is a song in honour of woman. The three female characters are all virtuous; Hermione, Paulina, Perdita, are eminently exemplary in their various conditions. The august but aspersed Queen, the faithful and honest Nurse, the innocent maiden brought up in the midst of pastoral enjoy-

ments, are equally beyond censure, and fairly stand as "faultless patterns of their sex." But the men are erring, selfish, passionate, mean, criminal, or vicious. These are all destined to bow at the foot of the pedestal on which Hermione is placed. And thereon to the end of time will she continue to be enthroned, in the majesty of womanly perfection, as one severely tried by the caprice of the tyrant man, yet faithful to the end. Yes, she will so continue in our idea, though in the play she is made to descend and prove that she was living, which, "were it but told, should be hooted at, *like an old tale.*" So says Paulina, as she presents the recovered daughter to the recovered mother:

> "Turn, good lady;
> Our Perdita is found.—Go together,
> You precious winners all: your exultation
> Partake to every one. I, an old turtle,
> Will wing me to some withered bough, and there
> My mate, that's never to be found again,
> Lament till I am lost."

But Shakspere will not permit Paulina to languish in widowhood. Camillo is given to her by the King for a husband—"an honourable husband," a fitting mate for "worth and honesty" like hers. And thus the poet not only celebrates the excellence of marriage when contracted for the first time between two loving hearts, but justifies second unions between persons in advanced life as preferable to a single state for either man or woman.

(*b*) Universal—Ideal and purely Poetic.

So much in the interest of order, and for the re-establishment of old original conventions in a progressive and new state of society, that, having cast aside many prejudices, needed regulation afresh. But the advancing mind of Shakspere desired liberty even from these self-imposed conditions; and soon we find him breathing "the freer air on the iced mountain-top," where Imagination might realise a larger prospect, and rise to more ideal altitudes. He now left fabulous for more authentic history; but, in his choice of Macbeth for a subject, marked a period of transition. Holinshed, from whom he took the plot,* had included in his narrative the legendary matter relative to Macbeth's Witches on the Heath (the Northern Fates or Valkyries), and thus suggested to Shakspere the psychological solution which serves for the idea of his drama. Superstition is the dominant element of Macbeth's mind; and Shakspere shows how this mere carnal piety is no security against, but rather provocative of, evil and sanguinary practices. He had already traced the abuses which had grown up in

* Holinshed borrowed the story from Bellenden's Scotch translation of the Latin chronicle of Hector Boethius. The Diary of Dr. Forman mentions that the tragedy was acted at the Globe, 20th April 1610; but doubtless it was written earlier—say 1608. An earlier date, however, has been assigned, from an allusion in act iv. scene 1, to the union of the three kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland, apropos, as it is supposed, of the proclamation of James I. as King of Great Britain and Ireland, made 20th October 1604.

superstitious times, but he had not yet treated the feeling itself. He now undertook to analyse it, and to give the result in a tragedy, partly lyrical, and partly dramatic, but in the highest sense poetic. The locale was suited to the action—the Highlands of Scotland, where every object is tinged with superstition, and tangible intercommunion with the supernatural world is still generally believed in. Macbeth's superstition accordingly is not felt by his contemporaries as a weakness in his character; but he is introduced in the beginning of the play as a thoroughly noble and heroic person. Besides, he is a man next in dignity to the King, and one who, under other circumstances, might have been himself king instead of Duncan. This is the ground-work of the political action of the play, at which Shakspere has barely hinted, for obvious reasons. The Scottish crown was elective in a certain line, and the two cousins had equal rights until the votes were declared in favour of Duncan. We are to infer that Macbeth was disappointed at the result, and that long before the date of the action in the tragedy he had conferred with his wife as to the means of recovering the ground that he had lost. Duncan, on the other hand, had sought to conciliate the powerful Thane, who, notwithstanding his secret ambitious designs, had served his monarch vigorously, and valiantly subdued his enemies. It was partly Macbeth's policy and partly his disposition so to act towards Duncan—for no doubt he would rather have compassed his designs honestly than violently. To this, indeed, his wife bears testimony:

> "Thou wouldst be great;
> Art not without ambition; but without
> The illness should attend it: what thou wouldst highly,
> That wouldst thou holily."

Yet it is evident that, long before the action of the play, both he and his wife had resolved upon the murder of Duncan, if needful for their purposes; since no sooner have the Weird-sisters pronounced their prophecy, than Macbeth concludes at once that the way to its fulfilment is by such means; Lady Macbeth, on receiving his letter, also jumps to the same conclusion, and afterwards, when her lord hesitates at employing assassination, now that the means are within his reach, reminds him of a former conference when the plan was debated and resolved, and taunts him with his want of determination, now that the long-sought opportunity has arrived:

> "Was the hope drunk
> Wherein you dressed yourself?
> What boast was't, then,
> That made you break this enterprise to me?
> When you durst do it, then you were a man;
> And to be more than what you were, you would
> Be so much more the man. *Nor time, nor place,*
> *Did then adhere*, and yet you would make both;
> They've made themselves, and that their fitness now
> Doth unmake you."

The Weird-sisters are, indeed, used by the poet as exponents of his hero's state of mind, and are but the dramatic projections of his moral condition. Shakspere, though using the incident of the chronicler, does not share in his credulity, and, while treating of superstition, shows himself to be quite free from its trammels. He words the oracles they utter very dif-

ferently from the historian, and gives them that double meaning and equivocation which, in the history of nations and individuals, has led to the ruin of both, when literally understood but in one sense, and that favourable to the recipient. In other respects, too, he deals with the record as a fabulous document, and changes its details at pleasure. History, in fact, does not charge Macbeth with the murder of Duncan, but simply states that the Thane slew the monarch at Inverness. Shakspere went further back into Scottish history for the circumstances of the murder, which properly related to the death of King Duffe, who was assassinated by Donwald, captain of the castle of Forres, at the instigation of his wife, an ambitious woman. The remorse which Macbeth is represented to have felt while doing the deed is predicated by the historian of the reluctant Donwald, who himself "greatly abhorred the contemplated act," but was urged on to its committal by his revengeful consort.

I have said that Shakspere only hints at Macbeth's political motives; and his reason was, that these in some degree justified the Thane's aspirations; but Shakspere was unwilling to permit them to appear to justify murder as the means of their accomplishment. He would not lend his countenance to the unreformed doctrine, still held by the Romanist, that "the end justifies the means." He does, however, provide Macbeth with an external determining cause, in the elevation of Malcolm to the princedom of Cumberland, which made him direct heir to the throne.

We may imagine, if we please, that there had been some implied contract between Duncan and himself, that Macbeth should be his successor, and that this condition was violated by Duncan's present act. We see that the King, to conciliate Macbeth, heaps up honours to him, and, it may be, regarded these as an equivalent substitute for the privilege of which at the same time he deprived him; and further makes amends by speaking of him in hypocritical terms of esteem, which are conceived in that exaggerated strain of compliment adopted by people when they are not sincere. Duncan pays deeply for this weakness, though otherwise a respectable person enough. Even Macbeth is compelled to acknowledge his more gracious attributes:

> "This Duncan
> Hath borne his faculties so meek, has been
> So clear in his great office."

History, however, no more gives this credit to Duncan, than it charges Macbeth with his murder. Wherefore, we must take the tragedy on its own grounds;—that is, as an ideal conception of the poet, and not as a chronicle-play such as he composed in an earlier period of development. Shakspere takes as many liberties with Macbeth's story as he had done with Lear's; indeed, cares little for its historical accuracy, but much for the idea which it enabled him to exemplify. We must note in Duncan as well as in Macbeth the influence of superstition, which made the former a hypocrite, while it stimulated the ambition of the latter.

Lady Macbeth also is superstitious, but not demonstratively imaginative. She is, therefore, not credulous like Macbeth, and neither sees witches, airy daggers nor ghosts, and ridicules the two latter as phantoms. Yet she apostrophises the Spirits that wait on murderous thoughts, but perhaps ironically and sceptically. And it is her provisional freedom from such imaginary terrors which makes her superior to her husband in the first instance, following out doggedly as she does their mutual design with the brute instinct of the mere natural murderess. No sooner, however, is the crime committed, than the feelings, which are latent even in apparently the most insensate natures, are awakened by the act, and the fancies which till then had slept begin to haunt the mind of the guilty woman, and to kindle the same remorse after the act which her husband had felt before it. She has now become "brain-sickly," and retires apart, "of sorriest fancies her companions making;" while Macbeth, restored to his normal state of consciousness, is busy with the murderers planning the death of Banquo. Yet, judging of his condition by her own, she charges him with affecting loneliness, and "using those thoughts which should indeed have died with them they think on;" but she is no longer Macbeth's superior. He, perceiving his advantage, resolves at once on retaining it; and while flattering her mood of mind, keeps the secret to himself of the business he had been transacting:

> "Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,
> Till thou applaud the deed."

This murderous couple love each other; even a crime like theirs could not cause marriage to appear less sacred in the eyes of Shakspere. He is careful to invest them with its holiness; and here makes Macbeth act with a benevolent motive, namely, that his wife's conscience, now too much disturbed, as he perceives, may not be implicated in another crime. He mystifies her by his language:

> "Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,
> While night's black *agents* to their *preys* do rouse."

Meaning by the former the murderers, and by the latter Banquo and Fleance, whom he has destined to the knife. But of this she understands nothing.

And so likewise, when he speaks to her of "eating their meal in fear, and sleeping in the affliction of those terrible dreams that shake them nightly," he is describing her state, not his own. It is she who lies "on the torture of the mind in restless ecstasy." He has marked it, and thus hints at it. He does, indeed, confess that his "mind is full of scorpions;" yet not because Duncan was murdered, but because "that Banquo and his Fleance live;" not remorse for the past, but fear for the future, is now his motive-spring. It is just the contrary with the guilty queen. The consciousness of her crime haunts her ever, and makes the erst apparently unimaginative woman now all-fantastic; and thus she is overridden with a power which, not being familiar with, she has not learned to control. At night Macbeth has watched her, and her somnolency has prevented his own slumbers. So that when, after the banquet, she remarks

to him, "You lack the season of all natures, sleep," he replies with ironical emphasis, "Come, we'll to *sleep*." And then, too, he confesses to a "strange and self-abuse;" but this is simply due to the fact that Fleance had escaped from the assassins:

> "Then comes my fit again: I had *else* been perfect;
> Whole as the marble, founded as the rock,
> As broad and general as the casing air;
> But now I am cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in
> To *saucy doubts and fears*."

These remarks may serve to show how minute the criticism should be that would develop the psychology of the Shaksperian dialogue, which, unless we penetrate to its Inner Life, will frequently delude both reader and actor. In the latter half of the tragedy the characters of Macbeth and his lady change places. It is she who is overrun with remorse for the past; so that she becomes somno-vigilant, and, finding life intolerable, commits suicide; while he recovers his bold and daring nature, and is only disturbed when he has reason to dread that, after all, he has not been able to secure the control over the future which he desired. Meantime he sustains his courage by resort to superstitious sources of comfort, consulting the Sisters, and acting on their counsel; while his demented wife suffers from self-torturing thought and the sense of unpardonable guilt. So that he is safe in his power, Macbeth has justified to his own conscience his right to it, and the means by which he had attained it. To the superstitious mind success is the guarantee that all is right; for have not the mysterious powers in which it confides given in

such success their sanction to their votary and the course of action he has pursued? When hard driven at the end, and therefore shaken as to the truth of this opinion, some traces of the human reappear in Macbeth, and he falls into melancholy reflections, not on his guilt, but on the unreality of life, which he describes as a "walking shadow," and as

> "A tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing."

What Macbeth had believed to be true proves false, and he perishes battling with fate.

All in this tragedy is symbolic—the diction, the action, and the dialogue. That is, each is but a representative portion of a larger whole. Lady Macbeth's letter is only suggestive, not the entire document; besides, she refers to other letters. There has been a large correspondence, which has "transported her beyond this ignorant present;" and the conversation in the seventh scene of the first act refers, as already intimated, to a long previous one. Of Sinel and Cawdor, to whose titles Macbeth succeeds, and of the "merciless Macdonwald," whom he subdues, nothing is told but their names; the Witches themselves are introduced without any explanation, and we have to refer them to a system of mythology which we can only guess at. Lady Macbeth in the last act comes suddenly before us as a somnambulist without any preparation in previous scenes; and what she says then in her soliloquy—and she says it in the briefest way—is to indicate to us a psychologi-

cal process, very obscurely foreshadowed in the third act, scene 2d, and which, on account of that obscurity, has been misunderstood. By this method of composition, Shakspere has gained a rapidity in the conduct of this drama which brings it into contrast with almost all the others. Thus, in illustrating a subject which reveals itself in types and symbols only on the stage of history and real life, Shakspere, with a fine inner instinct, gives the same form to his religious tragedy. Coleridge has remarked on the fact of its rapid movement, but not assigned the reason, though he remarks that the poet's "invocation is at once made to the imagination and the emotions connected therewith." He is wrong, moreover, in stating that there is not "a single pun or play on words in the whole drama." There *is* one, and it is made by Lady Macbeth:

> "If he do bleed,
> I'll *gild* the faces of the grooms withal,
> For it must *seem* their *guilt*."

In the excitement of the moment, her mind grows hilarious, and she sports with the crime; thus for the time lightening its burden. In the previous sentence, too, she had led up to the phrase in the present; prefacing *gilding* with *painting:*

> "The sleeping and the dead
> Are but as pictures: 'tis the eye of childhood
> That fears a *painted* devil."

This is an instance of the living organism of Shakspere's style, which grows and grows, one image giving birth to another.

According to his accustomed method of distri-

buting the prevailing idea of his drama among different characters, Shakspere has not contented himself with indicating the nature and tendency of superstition in his Scottish personages, but in the last scene of the fourth act takes us to England and exhibits to us the English king manifesting a healing power of a miraculous kind. Here is the reference, which, because it is universally omitted in the acting of the tragedy, I give *in extenso:*

"*Enter a Doctor.*

Malcolm. Well; more anon. Comes the king forth, I pray you?
Doct. Ay, sir; there are a crew of wretched souls
That stay his cure: their malady convinces
The great assay of art; but at his touch—
Such sanctity hath heaven given his hand—
They presently amend.
Mal. I thank you, doctor. [*Exit Doctor.*
Macd. What 's the disease he means?
Mal. 'Tis called the evil:
A most miraculous work in this good king;
Which often, since my here-remain in England,
I have seen him do. How he solicits heaven,
Himself best knows; but strangely-visited people,
All swoln and ulcerous, pitiful to the eye,
The mere despair of surgery, he cures;
Hanging a golden stamp about their necks,
Put on with holy prayers; and 'tis spoken,
To the succeeding royalty he leaves
The healing benediction. With this strange virtue,
He hath a heavenly gift of prophecy,
And sundry blessings hang about his throne,
That speak him full of grace."*

Such was the faith of the eleventh century. Superstition, then, is not to be regarded as a personal

* Perhaps Shakspere wished to intimate that as Macbeth had enlisted evil agencies in his cause, that of Malcolm was aided by good angels through the medium of the pious English monarch.

attribute of the Scottish thane and his wife, but as a characteristic of the age, comprehending as well the English epicure as the Scottish ascetic. In a rude period the purest religion can be no more than the superstition of the carnal man, his intellect as yet uninstructed, and his reason unexercised, while fancy or imagination may enjoy an uncontrolled activity. Edward the Confessor was reputed pious, and his life was chiefly devoted to so-called religious exercises, his time being greatly spent in prayer and fasting. For the miracles attributed to him, he was canonised by the Roman Church. His compeers were men of strife and wild manners, credulous in all that regards the supernatural in proportion to their ignorance, and sunk in sensual pursuits. Nor was the king's knowledge one whit superior to theirs, and his religious feelings were comprised within the same limits; such as his people, such was the royal saint; such as their religion, such was his—a superstition. Let us, however, not undervalue it; for superstition *is* the religion of the carnal man; and Shakspere represents his characters as holding the faith they maintained with perfect sincerity. On the other hand, religion itself is no more than the superstition of the spiritual man, however much it may have been purified from popular delusions. Theology, with the truly spiritual, is refunded into philosophy or poetry: the former as the *love* of Wisdom; and the latter as the exercise of the creative act by which her truths are impersonated as examples for human imitation. This consideration goes far to account for the intimate connexion

of the drama in its origin with religious ceremonials in all countries. Shakspere, however, assigns to superstitious motives little practical influence on the conduct of men. Political motives are those that really influence alike Macbeth, Duncan, and the English King; and the ambitious thane perishes without his fate affecting one tittle the evidences of his faith. Nor is his own allegiance to that faith consistent. He never hesitates to substitute his will for his belief, like the veriest sceptic. In this Shakspere paints like nature; for in none is infidelity so potent as in the superstitious. Superstition and infidelity necessarily accompany one another; like corresponding mottoes on either side of a traitor's shield, one or other to be shown as occasion may require.* Such a traitor is of course a coward, who constantly vacillates between hope and fear, because dealing with forces of which he is ignorant, and problems beyond his capacity to solve.

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* Skottowe notices these incongruities, which he says are in accordance with the theory of witchcraft, that consists of two contradictory doctrines. "The actions of Macbeth," says the honest dullard, "are not in constant accordance with his faith. They who placed the *golden round* upon his brow promised similar honours to the issue of another. He was bound to believe both, or neither, of these predictions. He rightly concluded, that *if chance would have him king, why—chance would crown him without his stir;* and he ought to have added, that if the succession of Banquo's children was registered among the decrees of fate, no human arm could arrest the march of that event. In neither case does he abide the event. He first yields to an alarm, on the elevation of Malcolm to the principality of Cumberland, of which his professed principles, *thrusted home*, ought to have demonstrated to him the fallacy; he next snatches by crime, as *the nearest way*, what was promised him as a gift; and lastly madly opposes himself to what he ought to have acknowledged a decree of fate."

The omissions made by the players in the last scene of the fourth act are injurious to its completeness and its purpose. Moreover, they generally omit the previous scene, representing the murder of Lady Macduff and her children, on the plea that the story is told in the succeeding one. But Shakspere had higher reasons for its insertion. It stands in contrast to the rest of the play—the natural amidst the supernatural. Lady Macduff looks to the reason of things, and sees no adequate cause for her lord's strange and abrupt flight. Her reflections are as full of pathos as of poetry:

> "His flight was madness. When our actions do not,
> Our fears do make us traitors.
> *Rosse.* You know not,
> Whether it was his wisdom or his fear.
> *L. Macd.* Wisdom! to leave his wife, to leave his babes,
> His mansions, and his titles, in a place
> From whence himself does fly? He loves us not:
> He wants the natural touch; for the poor wren,
> The most diminutive of birds, will fight,
> Her young ones in her nest, against the owl."

This image is one of great beauty; and what a relief to the darker shadows by which it is surrounded in the picture! And then observe the purity of the lady's mind, its natural piety and perfect simplicity. The dialogue with her son is peculiarly Shaksperian, and full of that humour which seethes in the mind in moments of excitement, when it fondly dallies with unknown terrors. These approach still more nigh, and her perceptions rapidly kindle:

> "Whither should I fly?
> I have done no harm; but I remember now
> I *am in this earthly world*, where to do harm

Is often laudable; to do good, sometimes
Accounted dangerous folly: why then, alas!
Do I put up that *womanly defence*,
To say, I have done no harm?"

I have witnessed this scene acted, though it is not usually performed, and can testify that it is in the acting strictly confined within the bounds of pity and terror—to the proper exclusion of horror. Most skilfully thrown in by the poet, it should never be passed over by the players.

The symbolical style of this tragedy almost imparts to it a Biblical character. Victor Hugo, indeed, considers that this typical character belongs to many of Shakspere's productions. The type condenses a world of examples in a single one. All possible usurers are crowded in Shylock; the whole of Judaism is concentrated in him: his whole nation, the high as well as the low, faith as well as fraud,—and it is because he sums up a whole race, such as oppression has made it, that Shylock is great. "Jews," says M. Hugo, "even those of the Middle Ages, might with reason say that not one of them is Shylock. Men of pleasure may with reason say that not one of them is Don Juan. No leaf of the orange-tree when chewed gives the flavour of the orange; yet there is a deep affinity, an identity of roots, a sap rising from the same source, the sharing of the same subterraneous shadow before life. The fruit contains the mystery of the tree, and the type contains the mystery of the man. Hence the strange vitality of the type. For—and this is the prodigy—the type lives. If it were but an abstraction, men would not recog-

nise it, and would allow this shadow to pass by. The tragedy termed classic makes heroes, the drama creates types. A lesson which is a man, a myth with a human face so plastic that it looks at you, and that its look is a mirror, a parable which warns you, a symbol which cries out, 'Beware,' an idea which is nerve, muscle, and flesh, and which has a heart to love, bowels to suffer, eyes to weep, and teeth to devour or laugh, a psychical conception—with the relief of actual fact, and which, if it bleeds, drops real blood; that is the type. O power of true poetry! types are beings. They breathe, palpitate, their steps are heard on the floor, they exist. They exist with an existence more intense than that of any creature thinking himself living there in the street. These phantoms have more density than man. There is in their essence that amount of eternity which belongs to *chefs-d'œuvre*, and which makes Trimalcion live, whilst M. Romieu is dead."

Notwithstanding the length of the above citation, I feel justified in making another.

"Types are cases foreseen by God; genius realises them. It seems that man prefers to teach man a lesson through man, in order to inspire confidence. The poet is on the pavement of the living; he speaks to them nearer to their ear. Thence the efficacy of types. Man is a premiss, the type the conclusion; God creates the phenomenon, genius puts a name on it. God creates the miser only, genius Harpagon; God creates the traitor only, genius makes Iago; God creates the coquette, genius makes Célimène;

God creates the citizen only, genius makes Chrysale; God creates the king only, genius makes Grandgousier. Sometimes, at a given moment, the type proceeds complete from some unknown partnership of the mass of the people with a great natural comedian, involuntary and powerful realiser; the crowd is a midwife; in an epoch which bears at one of its extremities Talleyrand, and at another Chodruc-Duclos, springs up suddenly, in a flash of lightning, under the mysterious incubation of the theatre, that spectre, Robert Macaire.

"Types go and come firmly in art and in nature. They are the ideal realised. The good and the evil of man are in these figures. From each of them results, in the eyes of the thinker, a humanity."

Here, perhaps, I should pause; but I cannot avoid completing the extract. M. Hugo had said "so many types, so many Adams." He therefore proceeds to state that "the man of Homer, Achilles, is an Adam; from him comes the species of the slayers: the man of Æschylus, Prometheus, is an Adam; from him comes the race of the fighters. Shakspere's man, Hamlet, is an Adam; to him belongs the family of the dreamers. Other Adams, created by poets, incarnate, this one passion, another duty, another reason, another conscience, another the fall, another the ascension. Prudence, drifting to trepidation, goes on from the old man Nestor to the old man Géronte. Love, drifting to appetite, goes on from Daphne to Lovelace. Beauty, entwined with the serpent, goes on from Eve to Melusina. The types begin in Genesis,

and a link of their chain passes through Restif de la Bretonne and Sadé. The lyric suits them, Billingsgate is not unbecoming to them. They speak in country dialects by the mouths of Gros-René, and in Homer they say to Minerva, holding them by the hair of the head: 'What dost thou want with me, goddess?'

"A surprising exception has been conceded to Dante. The man of Dante is Dante. Dante has, so to speak, created a second time in his poem; he is his own type; his Adam is himself. For the action of his poem he has sought out no one. He has only taken Virgil as supernumerary. Moreover, he made himself epic at once, without even giving himself the trouble to change his name. What he had to do was in fact simple—to descend into hell and remount to heaven. What good was it to trouble himself for so little? He knocks gravely at the door of the Infinite, and says, 'Open, I am Dante.'"

These admirable remarks compensate for much that is extravagant and erroneous in the work of Victor Hugo.

We have now arrived at a cluster of plays, of which it is not easy to settle the separate dates, but which appear to have been composed about the years 1608 and 1609. Probably they were all projected at the same time, and soon after sketched out, and then worked at alternately until finished; I allude to the three Roman plays—*Coriolanus*, *Julius Cæsar*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Shakspere had before trod on classic ground in *Troilus and Cressida*, but

that was a poetic subject; these are historic. The poet had studied Plutarch's biographies, and gathered from his pages the materials for his dramas. In them he sought for the institution of modern politics, and for illustrations of the various questions between peoples and governments, and the limits of freedom and power, with which Roman history abounds. From religion to politics, from Church to State, was but a step. The soul first considered, the body now claimed attention. In treating these subjects, Shakspere followed Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch, which was then a popular book, with scrupulous fidelity—sometimes with a literal correctness which led to some curious errors, showing that the poet had not at hand the means of critical decision.

Without attempting to decide which was first finished, I shall for the sake of convenience take them in the order in which they stand in the folio, that is in their chronological series, beginning with *Coriolanus*.

On this tragedy, Delia Bacon has composed such a thoroughly searching critique, that it is almost presumption to touch the subject again.

Shakspere, both as a poet and in the interest of his personal connections, manifests in the treatment of his hero an aristocratic bias. Coriolanus in his tragedy is much more amiable than in Plutarch's history. Shakspere does not entirely pass over to the other side, but endeavours to hold the scales more evenly. While he shows the faults in the boy patrician, he vindicates his relative status, and exposes the weakness of democracy when it has thrown off its al-

legiance to a leading order. A mob with him is a mindless animal, fickle from ignorance and the absence of control. If from any cause, just or otherwise, it is induced to cast off authority, it is without any regulating principle for its acts. Shakspere valued the aristocratic minds of his own age, and understood the worth of their influence on the body of the people. Without them, the elevated drama such as Shakspere and Ben Jonson wrote it, would not have existed. It became what it was through their patronage. For lack of that patronage in our own age, the poetic drama has scarcely a name to live, and many a fine scholar whose dramas would have done honour to the country has been left to perish, or apply his genius in another way. While, therefore, Shakspere permitted the commonalty to state their case freely, he made even them confess the merits of the youthful aristocrat whose conduct they arraigned. They are willing to consider "what services he has done for his country, and could be content to give him good report for't, but he pays himself with being proud." The faults of Coriolanus, too, are the faults of the individual, not of his class; and this is a distinction which Shakspere is especially anxious to enforce. They are the faults too of his youth, albeit Shakspere does not so much insist on this; yet no doubt he had in his eye some aristocratic youth who served him for a type; at any rate he must have met with many such in his experience. On the individual characteristics he dwells repeatedly. What Coriolanus had done famously, he did it to serve his pride; "though soft-

conscienced men can be content to say it was for his country, he did it to please his mother, and partly to be proud; which he is, even to the altitude of his virtue." Such is the simple citizen's artless portrait of Coriolanus, and the wiser poet has consciously adopted it in the painting of his dramatic picture.

Touching Shakspere's idea of an aristocracy, he has expressed it in the fable of the Belly and its members, which he places in the mouth of the old man Menenius Agrippa. "No public benefit but it proceeds or comes from" the senatorial classes, "and no way from the governed." While Shakspere has pretty strongly expressed his opinion against the divine right of kings, he has rendered his testimony to the services of an aristocracy. And this political doctrine is the practical one adopted by Englishmen, and made their public rule of conduct to the present day. But Coriolanus presumes too much on these, as if they were benefits conferred on inferior by superior beings; and thus, ignoring his humanity, cuts the links of sympathy by which his fellow men might have been bound to him. The Tribunes are in one extreme, Coriolanus in the other, Menenius standing between them as the mean of both. And thus we have the political problem fairly proposed, and in the end reasonably resolved.

We are next shown Coriolanus in his domestic relations. Volumnia his mother and Virgilia his wife explain for us his character, and more his bringing-up. The former we find an heroic woman, whose principle it was that honour became a person in his

station, and that for him not to be made to stir by renown was no better "than picture-like to hang by the wall;" and who had accordingly "sent him to a cruel war," that "seeking danger he might find fame, from whence he returned, his brows bound with oak." All Volumnia's feelings are strong. "I tell thee, daughter," says she, "I sprang not more in joy at first hearing he was a man-child, than now in first seeing he had proved himself a man."

Under the prompting of such a mother, Coriolanus could not fail to manifest a dangerous precocity in his boyhood and youth; for he lived in a daily state of excitement, where the least thing was accepted by his maternal instructress as the earnest of a noble future. In the hot summer sun of her praises his faculties received an early ripening, and he stood a man among men, while yet in years a boy. Out of this false relation his individual imperfections proceeded. He naturally presumed too much, and necessarily acted on insufficient experience. He required more culture;—he received it from the events of his brief life, indeed, but under conditions that involved his premature death.

How greatly he was stimulated and encouraged by his mother, even when a child, to violent effort, Shakspere has illustrated by an incident of the infancy of Coriolanus' little son, told by the lady Valeria, and accepted by Volumnia, as "one of his father's moods." "O' my word," says the lady, "the father's son: I'll swear 'tis a very pretty boy. O' my troth, I looked upon him o' Wednesday half

an hour together: he has such a confirmed countenance. I saw him run after a gilded butterfly; and when he caught it, he let it go again; and after it again; and over and over he comes, and up again; catched it again: or whether his fall enraged him, or how 'twas, he did so set his teeth, and tear it; O, I warrant, how he mammocked it! Indeed, 'tis a noble child." A wise restraint had better nourished a far truer nobility. But Volumnia's creed was comprised in vehement doing. "Hear me profess sincerely;—had I a dozen sons,—each in my love alike, and none less dear than thine and my good Marcius, —I had rather had eleven die nobly for their country than one voluptuously surfeit out of action." There is something of excess in all this, needing correction, which comes, and even in such violent guise as might have been expected.

Had Shakspere selected for his patrician hero a man whose mind had grown harmoniously with a wise teaching, and under such suitable conditions as aristocratic life can well afford, we might have had a perfect example of the poet's ideal of what a patrician ought to be. But such an affirmative instance of aristocratic principle, exhibiting the wisest and the best in human action, would not have furnished either the historic or a dramatic character. Such a negative instance as that of Coriolanus better served the turn. Nearly up to the mark, all but perfection, it still falls short of the standard, and so affords room for passion and individual peculiarities, without which character, as character, is not distin-

guishable. Coriolanus is therefore, though a tragic person, what theatrical artists call a character-part, not a perfect hero, which might only lapse into an abstract personality. Accordingly, we are interested in him as a man, and the actor who deeply studies him will, like John Kemble, daily discover in the part new and unexpected traits; the characteristic points will multiply upon him, the source whence they proceed being really infinite; namely, the will, so procreant of caprice—so variable in its phases, so ungovernable in its moods.

And now we see him before Corioli, recklessly laying a wager, which he loses, and ever outrunning discretion. That "better part of valour" has no hold on the Roman Marcius. He refuses to be beaten back to the trenches by the Volsces, and forces the latter to retire within their city, which alone he enters with them, and by his irrepressible courage renders it needful for them to reopen their gates to make way for his return, and thus provides opportunity for his brother Romans to enter likewise:

> "O, 'tis Marcius!
> Let's fetch him off, or make remain alike."

Lifted himself above all base and mercenary motives, he cannot bear to see his own soldiers plundering the enemy, and burns to encounter Aufidius without delay. Victorious, he disdains to accept a special recompense; but is mindful of small services himself, both refusing and giving like a god.

The first act of *Coriolanus* forms a prologue of ten scenes, full of action, wonderfully compressed,

and standing apart as a distinct drama. The next two acts form another, ending with the hero's banishment. The last two acts complete the trilogy. And thus the general action is disposed in large masses, carefully distinguished from each other; but, united, composing an artistic whole, testifying to the skill of the incomparable master.

Macbeth and Coriolanus resemble each other in the supposed action of political circumstances on a noble mind, destroying its balance, and driving it aside from the direct path, until, gradually diverging, it loses its way altogether, and falls in darkness over a precipice, instead of closing its journey safely, ere nightfall, in the vale beneath it. Operated upon by such influences, the former proves faithless to his king *de facto*, and the latter to his country. Patriotism is, therefore, the central idea of the Roman tragedy; and to realise this idea is the aim of its hero. But passion misguides him, so that, in the course of action, he actually takes up arms against his native land in the service of her enemies. By showing in what respects Coriolanus was *not* a patriot, the poet defines clearly the points that were needed to constitute him such, and thus, through an imperfect illustration, symbolises an idea by a partial conception. The idea can only be fully exhibited by the addition of other conceptions, embodied in other characters, such as Menenius Agrippa, Volumnia, the Tribunes of the people, and even Aufidius.

The general of the Volscians is nothing, if not a Volsce. He is all his country's, so to speak; he has

no individuality apart from hers. Love for her and hate for Rome are with him savage instincts. These instincts are partaken by Coriolanus, but with a difference;—they are swayed by his self-will, and dominated by his self-interest. When once they are antagonised by the latter, they are suppressed; but until then, he is as good a lover and as fervent a hater as Aufidius. When they meet on the battle-field, they confess to their mutual resemblance:

> "*Marcius.* I'll fight with none but thee; for I do hate thee
> Worse than a promise-breaker.
> *Aufidius.* We hate alike."

So intense becomes the hatred of Aufidius, that, being worsted, it absorbs in him the sense of honour, almost denaturalises him—converts him from a man into a beast:

> "By the elements,
> If e'er again I meet him beard to beard,
> He is mine, or I am his. Mine emulation
> Hath not that honour in't it had; for where
> I thought to crush him in an equal force,
> True sword to sword, I'll potch at him some way,
> Or wrath, or craft, may get him."

This is unreasoning, unreflective patriotism, exaggerated to such fierce wrath as would excuse any means, however vile, for the sake of the end. Aufidius, however, in describing his state of mind, talks rather like the poet than himself:

> "My valour's poisoned,
> With only suffering stain by him: for him
> 'T shall fly out of itself: nor sleep, nor sanctuary,
> Being naked, sick; nor fane, nor Capitol,
> The prayers of priests, nor times of sacrifice,
> Embargments all of fury, shall lift up
> Their rotten privilege and custom 'gainst

> My hate to Martius. Where I find him, were it
> At home upon my brother's guard, even there,
> Against the hospitable canon, would I
> Wash my fierce hand in 's heart."

This mode of describing instead of expressing passion is sometimes necessary in dramatic writing. Want of the requisite space requires what in painting we denominate foreshortening; and here we have strong and various feelings compressed into a few passionate lines.

The difference between the patriotism of Coriolanus and Aufidius is, that with the latter the soil, and those born on the soil, constitute his country; with the former, it is the State, and the wise and worthy who administer public affairs, and without these his idea of country would be wanting in soul—would be, verily, a body without a soul. Aufidius knows no such refinements, nor the temptations that are born of such; but cherishes a robust attachment to his native city and his fellow-townsmen, simply because they are such, and not on account of their merits. He makes no distinction between the mob and the senate, between plebeian and patrician. Society with the Volscians is yet deficient in civility, and therefore the sentiment of country is altogether of a ruder indiscriminate kind. Coriolanus measures his fellow-countrymen with himself, and finding them incapable of appreciating him at his proper value, resents their ingratitude and banishes them from his heart, even as they banish him from the soil.

This tragedy is written in Shakspere's middle and familiar style, not in that which distinguishes *Troilus*

and Cressida and *Antony and Cleopatra.* The same style is continued in *Julius Cæsar*, which is a further development of the same idea. In this we find the danger, apprehended by the instinct of the multitude from the self-assertion of such characters as Coriolanus, realised. Courage, the highest virtue of the ancients, and, indeed, the absorbent of all others, threatens as much as it protects, and unless self-restrained, endangers the liberty of its associates. If it aim at the summit of power, it will naturally subordinate every interest to its own. This tendency the Roman people had interrupted in the case of Coriolanus; but the tendency had set in, and its purpose was accomplished in Cæsar. The Roman people had, therefore, to deal at length with the fact, and though in doing so they destroyed the man, the fact remained. Ultimately it proved too strong for them, and the Cæsar remained an institution, represented by spirits less noble than he who gave it name. Shakspere, in giving us the whole of this development with an admirable impartiality, has censured as much the patrician extreme, culminating in imperialism, as he has the democratic extreme, which, by furnishing excuses for arbitrary measures, enabled the aristocracy to overstep the reasonable limits of their influence.

It has been objected by some foreign critics that Shakspere has painted his Roman mobs like English ones, and not as the Roman people really were. Shakspere, tracing the English people to a Trojan source, doubtless identified the races. In his view,

a Roman was only an Englishman in Italy, and an Englishman a Roman in Britain. He had legend and act of parliament to corroborate him in this judgment; and, after all, human nature is the same in all countries, and the uninstructed many every where present the same grotesque features when in action.

Gervinus rightly observes that the simple, plain, and yet not unimaginative apprehension and representation of human affairs in Plutarch addressed itself so clearly both to Shakspere's head and heart that in the tragedies, the plots of which he derived from that author's biographies, he set bounds to his freedom, wholly renounced his arbitrary power, and closely followed the original text. "We doubt," he adds, "whether we shall find Shakspere greater when he invented every thing, regardless of his sources, or when he took all as he found it; whether we shall most admire in the one case his free power of creation, or in the other his submission and self-denial;" —a sentiment which strangely accords with that which I have already expressed in regard to our dramatist, in *Romeo and Juliet*, following so submissively in the steps of Brooke's poem. Far from all pride of authorship and all pursuit after originality, Shakspere appears before us in his Roman tragedies as a classic biographer, never attempting to strive with nature, but rather reverentially to preserve her uninjured in the genuine form which he found before him. If the sense of truth and the modesty which are peculiar to his character shine forth any where, it is surely here.

There had been many previous dramas on the sub-

ject of Julius Cæsar; a *History of Cæsar and Pompey* in 1579, and a Latin play by Dr. Richard Eedes in 1582, acted in the University of Oxford. In 1602, *Cæsar's Fall* was composed by Munday, Drayton, Webster, and Middleton; in 1604, Lord Stirling wrote a *Julius Cæsar*, and a *Cæsar and Pompey* appeared in 1607.

In a soliloquy by Brutus in this tragedy, there is one line which is evidently corrupt, and has puzzled the commentators, but has not yet received all the attention that it requires. Coleridge has indeed noticed it:

"For if thou path, thy native semblance on."

"Surely," says the critic, "there need be no scruple in treating this *path* as a mere misprint or misscript for *put*. In what place does Shakspere—where does any other writer of the same age—use *path* as a verb for *walk?*" Notwithstanding this, the line remains unaltered in the book and on the stage, except that it is variously punctuated in various editions. To me it is clear that the line contains *two* errors. It should have run:

"For if thou pall thy native semblance o'er."

Shakspere had already used the verb *to pall* in the same sense in *Macbeth:*

"And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell."

The line which I wish to correct occurs in scene i. act ii. of *Julius Cæsar*. Lucius enters to Brutus, and announces the entrance of Cassius and his fellow conspirators, whom he describes as having "their

faces *buried* in their cloaks." It is to this statement that Brutus refers in the line in question, which simply means that if conspirators come with "their faces buried in their cloaks," their conspiracy will be naturally suspected;—that the true mode of concealment is to let their naked faces (their "native semblance") be seen, and only to "hide" the "monstrous visage" of conspiracy "in smiles and affability." With this interpretation the passage reads intelligibly enough, and the line as amended falls naturally into its proper place: *e. g.*

> "Let them enter.
> They are the faction. O conspiracy!
> Shamest thou to show thy dangerous brow by night,
> When evils are most free? O, then, by day
> Where wilt thou find a cavern dark enough
> To mask thy monstrous visage? Seek none, conspiracy;
> Hide it in smiles and affability:
> For if thou pall thy native semblance o'er,
> Not Erebus itself were dim enough
> To hide thee from prevention."

Here all the images are consistent, both in the speech itself, and with the previous speech by Lucius. The faces *buried* in their cloaks suggest the image of the *pall*, and this again the allusion to *Erebus*.

Of all Shakspere's characters Brutus approaches nearest to that of a perfect hero, and was intended by the poet to do so:

> "This was the noblest Roman of them all.
> All the conspirators, save only he,
> Did what they did in envy of great Cæsar;
> He only, in a generous honest thought
> Of common good to all, made one of them.
> His life was gentle; and the elements
> So mixed in him, that Nature might stand up,
> And say to all the world, 'This was a man!'"

Shakspere is always explaining his characters in this way. But this, his man of nature, is not absolutely faultless. We are first presented to him when in a troubled mood, and with himself at war, so that he lacks of his wonted courtesy even to his friends. He is in dread lest the people should choose Cæsar for their king. They do, and his soul is then stirred to its depths. Thus disturbed, he is in a fit state to be wrought upon by Cassius, and he yields to the tempter. Cassius himself is so driven from his propriety, that he contemplates suicide with complacency. On this subject Shakspere had modified his opinion since he wrote *Hamlet*. Cassius says, on hearing that on the morrow Cæsar will be established by the senate as king:

> "I know where I will wear this dagger then;
> Cassius from bondage will deliver Cassius.
> Therein, ye gods, you make the weak most strong;
> Therein, ye gods, you tyrants do defeat:
> Nor stony tower, nor walls of beaten brass,
> Nor airless dungeon, nor strong links of iron,
> Can be retentive to the strength of spirit;
> But life, being weary of these earthly bars,
> Never lacks power to dismiss itself.
> If I know this, know all the world besides,
> That part of tyranny that I do bear,
> I can shake off at pleasure."

Brutus has already thought out the subject for himself, and determined on Cæsar's assassination. The state of his mind is chaotic—all in a condition of feud:

> "Since Cassius first did whet me against Cæsar,
> I have not slept.
> Between the acting of a dreadful thing,
> And the first motion, all the interim is
> Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream:

> The Genius and the mortal instruments
> Are then in council; and the state of man,
> Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
> The nature of an insurrection."

And now he is visited by the conspirators, who at once show the difference between their low minds and his lofty one by proposing to "swear their resolution." Brutus spurns the proposal, and refuses to

> "stain
> The even virtue of our enterprise"

by any such extraneous bond. Here is apparent the weakness of Brutus, in having associated with minds so much beneath his own; and this weakness soon shows itself constitutional, in his objecting to admit the participation of a superior or equal mind. He will not take Cicero into his counsel. Nor will he go all lengths with his confederates, but insists on sparing Antony, and by so doing ruins his cause. Had he consulted with a wiser, though not better man, he might have learned a surer way of securing their common end. As it is, the catastrophe of the tragedy grows out of the failings of Brutus, which, though they "leaned to virtue's side," were still failings, and fatal both to his friends and his country.

In his domestic relations Brutus is most exemplary; his love for his wife and his charity for his page show the amiability of his disposition. Portia, too, is as true a woman as Brutus a man, but without his infirmity. She is worthy to know the secrets he would have debarred her from, and had made proof of her constancy by making a voluntary wound in her thigh, which she had persevered in concealing.

The assassination is accomplished; and Brutus, satisfied with a sense of having done his duty, becomes again stoically calm. He has no fear, and permits to Antony all that he asks, standing himself on the justice of his cause, and trusting in the favour of the gods. Further, he is wilful, and will not listen to Cassius' prudence. The man who will not yield to Cæsar or Cicero insists on all others yielding to him. The gentle Brutus is himself unconsciously a tyrant. And here we have another instance of that duality which so frequently meets us in Shakspere's dramas, and which indeed will naturally attach itself to any subject when dramatically treated.

And now this sublime folly of Brutus has led to the wreck which was foretold. Antony, being granted the opportunity, has out-tongued Brutus, and the people have risen against their deliverers. Under these circumstances it was but natural that Cassius and Brutus should quarrel; but after all it is on secondary issues; for so it is customary that motives disguise themselves, and lower questions have to bear the weight of heavier ones. Cassius can as ill bear the tyranny of Brutus' virtue as that of Cæsar's power. But their reconciliation is noble, and, mixed up as it is with the story of Portia's death, marvellously pathetic. Still Brutus overbears Cassius, and wrongly; for Cassius is the better politician, being more on a level with the art and its professors. Brutus outsoars the occasion, and for want of a little practical pliability, loses the advantage. At length, through his precipitation too, the battle

of Philippi is lost; and the Cæsar is established as an institution in Rome.

That Shakspere had now arrived at the summit of his fame is corroborated by some curious external evidence. It is now that his name is misappropriated by publishers, and appended to works which the best critics have since disclaimed. Among these is *The Yorkshire Tragedy*, which was published in 1608, and had been acted in 1604. The tragedy of *Pericles* too was first printed with Shakspere's name on the title-page in 1609. In this year likewise the Sonnets were first of all published, with the title of "*Shakespere's Sonnets.* Never before imprinted. At London by G. Eld, for T. T., and are to be sold by John Wright, dwelling at Christ Church-gate, 1609." The work is a small quarto, and contains besides the Sonnets, *A Lover's Complaint.* T. T. is, on the testimony of the entry of the Stationers' registers, "2d May, 1609, Tho. Thorpe;" and by this same Thomas Thorpe the dedication to W. H. (probably William Hathaway, Shakspere's brother-in-law), as "the only begetter" (*collector*) of the Sonnets, is signed.

In closing his cycle of Roman plays, Shakspere's ambition manifested itself in the highest form. His intellectual energies had already blended with and modified his imaginative, his passionate, and his creative power and impulses; but they were now to be identified at the acme of their manifestations, in his sublime and wonderful tragedy of *Antony and Cleopatra.* We have already witnessed the poet looking down, as a superior intelligence, on the loves of *Troi-*

lus and Cressida, and sporting as an equal with those of *Venus and Adonis*. We have now to see him identify himself with two mortals at the height of fortune, who, in a species of heroic madness, had conceived themselves to be in the position of Divine Powers, exempt from all laws except that of their own wills. This is the elevation at which Shakspere sustains his argument, and thus prevents it from becoming immoral, as it does in the hands of Dryden, who paints his heroine and hero as mere human persons, of great rank indeed, indulging in voluptuous and licentious habits. No notion of guilt attaches to the conduct of Shakspere's *Antony and Cleopatra* either in the poet's opinion or their own. They absolutely transcend all relative conventions, all possible forms of manners. They consciously acknowledge, and therefore transgress, no law. They live in an ideal region, far above the reach of a moral code, and justify their acts on the warranty of their own nature. They swear by and recognise no higher power than themselves.

That this is a false position there is no doubt; and the poet, by the catastrophe of his tragedy shows it to have been such. But while the divine revels last, the actors in them fully believe that they are the divinities whom they would represent. Antony and Cleopatra surrender themselves without reserve to the inspirations with which they are filled, and are no less in their own estimation than the very deities of love. They suffer no vulgar criticism, no every-day cares, to come near them, and hold them-

selves aloof from the customary and the common. They sit on thrones outside the circle of the round globe, and repose on couches which float in air-like clouds, and never touch the surface of the planet.

Owing to these transcendental attributes, the tragedy in question is not a fit product for the estimation of the popular mind, and in fact never has been popular except as a stage-spectacle. Many have, therefore, treated it as if indicating a decay in the poet's powers, and impeaching his judgment in the choice of subject. Others, like Coleridge, never peruse it without a doubt arising in their minds, "whether the *Antony and Cleopatra* is not, in all exhibitions of a giant power, in its strength and vigour of maturity, a formidable rival of *Macbeth*, *Lear*, *Hamlet*, and *Othello*." In the mind of its creator it was, no doubt, greater even than these; and it is the part of the true critic to discover in what this greatness consists.

There is a poetic valour as well as a personal one, and it required a brave poet to conceive and execute such a design. With a happy audacity, Shakspere rises from the beginning to the height of his theme. The love of his heroic pair, they assume to be boundless. To set a bourne to it, would require the discovery of a new heaven, new earth. The manner in which Antony suffers the imperial Egyptian to overbear his very manhood shows at any rate that his is without limits. No consideration or interest, however solemn or serious, can prevent its extension. Even

"Let Rome in Tyber melt, and the wide arch
Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space.
Kingdoms are clay: our dungy earth alike
Feeds beast as man: *the nobleness of life*
Is to do thus; when such a mutual pair
And such a twain can do't, in which I bind,
On pain of punishment, the world to weet,
We stand up peerless."

He swears, too, by "the love of Love," and would devote every "minute of their lives" to its service. Such a passion reveals the infinite in the human lover. Antony feels that it drives him to excess; one moment, and he will resist it,

"These strong Egyptian fetters I must break;"

another moment he forsakes all to return within the power of the enchantress. Of the infinity of his love Cleopatra is herself certified, and also of her own. Hence exclaims she,

"*Eternity* was in our lips and eyes;
Bliss in our brows bent; none our parts so poor
But was a race of heaven."

Yet all the while this was but a waking dream, and destined to a rude dispelling. It would live against the material actualities of active existence; but illusion, however ideal, has but a brief continuance.

That, notwithstanding her coquetries, Cleopatra loves Antony, it is evidently the poet's intention that we should believe. The munificent nature of the man has fixed her regard. She loves him, because she thoroughly esteems him and his greatness. She is perfectly sincere and earnest. To her he is nothing less than

"The demi-Atlas of the earth, the arm
And burgonet of men."

In thinking of him, she feeds herself

"With most delicious poison;"

and praises whatever he does, or whatever mood he may be in. In all, he is to her "the man of men;" and when absent from her, she still pursues him with letters:

"Who's born that day
When I forget to send to Antony,
Shall die a beggar."
"Get me ink and paper;—
He shall have every day a several greeting,
Or I'll unpeople Egypt."

She loves him, not only as a woman, but as a queen. She had wooed him as such, when she first met him on the river of Cydnus:

"The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne,
Burned on the water: the poop was beaten gold;
Purple the sails, and so perfumed, that
The winds were love-sick with them; the oars were silver;
Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
The water, which they beat, to follow faster,
As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,
It beggared all description: she did lie
In her pavilion (cloth of gold and tissue),
O'erpicturing that Venus, where we see
The fancy outwork nature: on each side her
Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,
With diverse-coloured fans, whose wind did seem
To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,
And what they undid, did."

The describer of this magnificent show is Enobarbus, a rough soldier in Antony's interest, who performs the part of chorus to the action. It is he who regards the amours of his master in a poetic light; nearly all the other characters take a vulgar view of

them, and speak in the grossest terms of the transaction. These are the shadows on the picture, which in other parts shines out all the brighter from the contrast. He fully understands the depth of Antony's passion, and the futility of his marriage with Octavia. When Mecænas declares that Antony must in consequence leave Cleopatra utterly, he replies:

> "Never; he will not.
> Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
> Her infinite variety: other women cloy
> The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry,
> Where most she satisfies; for vilest things
> Become themselves in her."

She, by nature, indeed, was the only fitting mate for such a spirit as Antony's—"noble, courageous, high, unmatchable;" and it is this fitness which lends a sanction to their union. The fervency of her love was tested by her jealousy. When told of his marriage with Octavia, she beats and nearly stabs the messenger. Her passion and imagination combine, and in her madness she raves gorgeously; her utterances are rich with orientalisms. In some sort her rivalry with Octavia is amusing. She questions the messenger as to the colour of her hair, her height, her voice, her motion, her years, her face, as if for any of these things Antony had wed the lady, and not wholly for policy. Nor was she altogether wrong; for a marriage of convenience might be changed into one of affection by the virtues of a wife. One feature, however, she takes for a type of the whole—Octavia's face is round; and Cleopatra reflects that,

> "For the most part, too, they are foolish that are so."

Which conclusion the messenger corroborates by adding that "her forehead" was "as low as you would wish it."

Cleopatra is now satisfied that Octavia is not to be dreaded. And, indeed, Antony gladly takes advantage of a disagreement with her brother, to justify a parting, and while she seeks the latter, he flies to Egypt. And now but that these high contracting lovers really loved so that even in the battle they must be together, Antony might have check-mated Cæsar. Dared to a fight at sea by his great enemy, he ventures against all remonstrance on the treacherous element. Cleopatra is there too with her "sixty sails, none better." None better! why, all of them, on the slightest repulse, "fly, and turn the rudder." Which seeing,

> "The noble ruin of her magic, Antony,
> Claps on his sea-wing, and, like a doting mallard,
> Leaving the fight in height, flies after all."

And so for love Antony loses the world! Self-indignant is he, counsels his attendants to fly too, and surrenders himself to despair and shame. In his agony he reproaches her whom he best loved:

> "O, whither hast thou led me, Egypt? See,
> How I convey my shame out of thine eyes,
> By looking back what I have left behind
> 'Stroyed in dishonour.
> *Cleo.* O, my lord! my lord!
> Forgive my fearful sails; I little thought
> You would have followed.
> *Ant.* Egypt, thou knewst too well
> My heart was to thy rudder tied by the strings,
> And thou shouldst tow me after: o'er my spirit
> Thy fell supremacy thou knewst, and that

> Thy beck might from the bidding of the gods
> Command me."

Few words, much meaning. Wonderful as this play is in all respects, not the least wonderful in it is the compression of the style. Only by the most rigid economy of words could so wide an action be contained within reasonable limits. What a loss do these brief speeches intimate! Yet will not the loving Antony, reproach her as he may, permit Cleopatra, who pleads for pardon, and that only, to weep:

> "Fall not a tear, I say: one of them rates
> All that is won and lost. Give me a kiss;
> Even this repays me."

And so comes ruin on those who "would make their will lord of their reason." In these words the poet explains his entire tragedy. Will lord of reason! It is the dangerous prerogative of will, that it can, as the superior faculty, reverse the decisions of reason. Will mediates, indeed, between the Conscience and the Reason, and appeals to the self-intelligence in which ideas originate against the laws that proceed from them, and thus subordinates the latter to caprice. Here Enobarbus again plays the chorus, and in this and other speeches is intrusted with the philosophy of the argument, for the instruction of the audience. Thus when Antony challenges Cæsar to single combat, he remarks:

> "I see men's judgments are
> A parcel of their fortunes; and things outward
> Do draw the inward qualities after them,
> To suffer all alike."

But Enobarbus expresses his judgment of Antony's folly not only articulately but practically. He fol-

lowed his success—with that, he leaves him. But Antony's high heart and proud self-will sustain him awhile against all odds. I know nothing grander than his speeches when ordering Cæsar's messenger to be whipped for having kissed Cleopatra's hand. O, it is indeed a noble and most poetical frenzy, climbing to the height of imagery and passion. The scene terminates the third act and second cycle of this loftiest of historical tragedies.

The next act is occupied with the antecedents of Antony's death, and terminates with his death itself. The last act details the circumstances attending Cleopatra's. Both are full of the grandest things in the way of poetry and passion. One of the finest is the remorse and death of Enobarbus for having deserted his munificent master, and that master's generous pardon:

> "O Antony!
> Nobler than my revolt is infamous,
> Forgive me in thine own particular;
> But let the world rank me in register
> A master-leaver and a fugitive."

And so, forth sighing his master's name, the brave soldier's great heart breaks. Never was any thing so pathetic; and as poetry nothing more sublime than what follows:

> "*Ant.* Sometimes we see a cloud that's dragonish,
> A vapour, sometime, like a bear or lion,
> A towered citadel, a pendant rock,
> A forked mountain or blue promontory
> With trees upon't, that nod unto the world,
> And mock our eyes with air: thou hast seen these signs;
> They are black vesper's pageants.
> *Eros.* Ay, my lord.
> *Ant.* That which is now a horse, even with a thought,

The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct,
As water is in water.
Eros. It does, my lord.
Ant. My good knave, Eros, now thy captain is
Even such a body: here I am Antony,
Yet cannot hold this visible shape, my knave.
I made these wars for Egypt and the queen,
Whose heart I thought I had, for she had mine,
Which, whilst it was mine, had annexed unto it
A million more, now lost; she, Eros, has
Packed cards with Cæsar's, and false played my glory,
Unto an enemy's triumph."

Antony is in error in this supposition. Cleopatra had intended only to deceive Cæsar. However, she cannot endure the thought of Antony's ceasing to love her; and thoroughly to rekindle his affection, she sends word that she has died pronouncing his name. This lie, a loving one, is characteristic and immensely suggestive. Moreover, it is fatal to Antony, for thereupon he commands his freedman, in Roman fashion, to slay him, and, on Eros slaying himself instead, falls on his own sword. Nor has he the satisfaction of being permitted to believe her falsehood;—for moved by passion and anxiety, she sends for him to her monument, where she had locked herself in. His closing scene, accordingly, he passes in her company. He learns that she will not seek her safety from Cæsar, but meet danger with an honourable death. Affliction, indeed, seizes hold of her. To be called "Royal Egypt!" and "Empress!" she feels is now a mockery, and exclaims:

"No more, but even a woman; and commanded
By such poor passion as the maid that milks,
And does the meanest chares."

The last act of the tragedy is devoted to her self-

immolation. It is in a strain of glorious poetry, and worthy of the ancient story which it would reproduce. It ascends to the utmost height of the heroic—grand, solemn, sublime, in richness of thought and language unsurpassable, perhaps unapproachable by any other poet.

Psychologically considered, these three Roman plays are portions of one and the same argument. Patrician pride and exclusiveness in the wilful youth Coriolanus, with an exaggerated idea of personal merit, suggest the danger to the commonwealth which Brutus and Cassius endeavoured to cut short in the mighty Julius. A speech of the former, which puzzles Shakspere's greatest critic, receives its explanation in *Antony and Cleopatra.* Brutus, deciding in his own mind that the state could only be served by Cæsar's death, remarks that he has "no personal cause to spurn at him, but for the general," and then adds:

> "He would be crowned;
> *How that might change his nature*, there's the question.
> It is the bright day that brings forth the adder,
> And that craves wary walking."
> "Since the quarrel
> Will bear no colour for the thing he is,
> Fashion it thus; that what he is, augmented,
> Would run to these, and these extremities;
> And therefore think him as a serpent's egg,
> Which, hatched, would, as his kind, grow mischievous,
> And kill him in the shell."

Greatness united with power aims at such distinction that a gulf as wide as Hades yawns between the governing and the governed. The height of the hill is measured by the depth of the valley. "The leanness that afflicts others, the abjectness of their

misery, is as an inventory to particularise the abundance" of the former. "The sufferance of others is a gain to them." So the citizens in *Coriolanus*, taught by the instinct of hunger, justly think. Coriolanus himself, also taught by the instinct of ambition, says, "Who deserves greatness deserves the hate" of the latter. Such an one demands that his will and judgment shall prevail over those of others, whom his pride will not consent that he should consult. However good he may be, he aims at an unwholesome condition of things, which acts no more maleficently on others than on himself. Brutus looks to this possible result, and in the now seeming angel sees the future possible fiend. The incipient greatness both in Coriolanus and Cæsar lies in the strength of the will; and what might it not have done with either, had the sequel not been precluded by their premature death? The question which so afflicts Brutus, Shakspere has answered in his last Roman tragedy. Both Antony and Octavius Cæsar furnish the reply. Neither will permit any thing to stand in the way of his self-gratification. The utmost enjoyment, whether of luxury or power, is the grand purpose of their lives. To command this is their only aim, nor will either of them shrink from atrocious crime if needful to realise their object. The poet shows Pompey provoking his ruin by refusing to sanction a wholesale assassination of the co-leaders of the world on board his vessel. He did not, however, object to the crime itself, but only to the stain it might cast on his own reputation. Thus Menas tempts Pompey:

"*Men.* Wilt thou be lord of the whole world? But entertain it,
And, though thou think me poor, I am the man
Will give thee all the world.
Pom. Hast thou drunk well?
Men. No, Pompey, I have kept me from the cup.
Thou art, if thou darest be, the earthly Jove:
Whate'er the ocean pales, or sky inclips,
Is thine, if thou wilt have 't.
Pom. Show me which way.
Men. These three world-sharers, these competitors,
Are in the vessel: let me cut the cable;
And, when we are put off, fall to their throats,
All then is thine."

What says Pompey to this infamous proposition?

"Ah, this thou shouldst have done,
And not have spoke on 't. In me, 'tis villany;
In thee, 't had been good service. Thou must know,
'Tis not my profit that does lead mine honour;
My honour, it. Repent that e'er thy tongue
Hath so betrayed thine act; being done unknown,
I should have found it afterwards well done;
But must condemn it now. Desist, and drink.
Men. (*aside*) For this,
I'll never follow thy palled fortunes more.
Who seeks, and will not take when once 'tis offered,
Shall never find it more."

And this is the state that the world is brought to by those who climb ambition's ladder, and turn their back on the lower steps that had aided their ascent. It lies ultimately at the mercy of men who, whatever their excellent qualities may have been originally, come at last to this moral and mental condition, that, provided appearances be saved, to secure fortune they will shrink from no guilt. The time came to Rome when even that provision was not heeded; when her great men and her Cæsars led the lives of madmen, and recognised no allegiance either to con-

science or convenience. Under the influence of irresponsible Self-will, in a sensual direction, such are the results. What would they be, in a spiritual one? Rome tried that too, and not for herself only, but for the world; and such a chaos of morals ensued, that the men of Shakspere's age had to reform them in the Church, and in a subsequent one in the State. This matter, too, our poet has considered in his *Henry VIII.* But previous to treating the theme he subjected his mind and genius to a further discipline.

(*c*) Abstract, and purely Intellectual.

So thoroughly enamoured had Shakspere now grown of poetically forthshadowing the sublime ideas which had been suggested to his mind in the course of his study of history and observation of society, that he became ambitious of ascending higher than ever before he had attempted in the scale of imaginative production, and sought to impersonate the mere abstractions of the mind, and the purer intuitions of self-consciousness, in his later massive and colossal dramas. This plan he further pursued in his singularly intellectual drama of *The Tempest*, in which he has improved on his fantastic masque of a *Midsummer-Night's Dream.* The *Tempest* is as sublime as the *Dream* is beautiful. But it is regulated by stricter laws, and admits not of the caprices which are permitted to the fancy, but which the loftier faculty of imagination proudly transcends, as better enabled to deal with its subject in a direct and lordly

manner. The public imagination also, no less than Shakspere's own, had been stimulated by the spirit of adventure and discovery which was the characteristic of his age. Travellers told strange tales of distant isle and wilderness, and by their exaggerations forced even the vulgar to apprehend marvels beyond the limits of actuality. Of influences such as these the poet adroitly took advantage in his poem. He was indebted to the printed accounts of the wreck of Sir George Somers in the Bermudas, which happened in 1609, and his adventures on a desert island, for many suggestions. Shakspere's play was first acted in 1611, and had probably been written the previous year. The Bermudas are called in Shakspere's play the Bermoothes, and had been popularly regarded as an enchanted pile of rocks whose inhabitants were devils and witches. These popular notions it is supposed that Shakspere accepted; and in accordance with them, and also as a great improvement upon them, created his venerable magician, his monster Caliban, his foul witch Sycorax, her god Setebos, his delicate Ariel, and the human characters who suffer under enchantment in a distant island. The play itself is one entirely and purely intellectual. The characters are all ideal; those of Prospero, Alonzo, Miranda, Ferdinand, and the sailors, quite as much as the Spirits by which they are attended. The form of the play is exceedingly regular, albeit the action is complex, comprehending three groups of characters; so that it stands in contrast with the series of plays which we have been just considering. The action is

not only complex, but, with all its unity, has much variety, and involves the persons subject to it in perplexities throughout. Its structure is also epic. It commences *in media re*, with the wreck of the vessel; and afterwards occasion is taken to introduce the episode of the manner in which Prospero had arrived at the island, which the father now tells to Miranda, as Ulysses and Æneas tell to Nausicaa and Dido the tale of Troy and the story of their wanderings. It is, indeed, a brief epic poem divided into act and scene. A religious allegory is evidently intended in it; and an excursion in a once-favourite direction, lately abandoned for the historic treated ideally, must have served to divert the poet's mind after tasks of great severity.

Will is the source of personality, but not necessarily of dramatic character, which depends on less abstract attributes than those that belong to pure volition. It was a daring flight indeed which led Shakspere to the very fountain-head of individuality, and to shape character out of nothing but the caprices of the irresponsible will, associated with imperial power. The astonishing success that crowned the effort was partly due to the intensified passion in which those caprices were expressed, and the sensual direction which that will had taken. The strife between a will thus directed, and the physical necessities that obstruct its action, are the immediate occasion of the passion excited, which rages all the more in proportion as its liberty is infringed or questioned. A will to be perfectly free must act purely

in a moral sphere, where will and power are one. This privilege can rarely be shared by the man of action; who, though he may shape many things according to his wish, must find in his experience much intractable matter that defies alteration. It belongs more especially to the contemplative man, who, whether as sage, poet, or artist, acts in a spiritual sphere, where all is plastic to voluntary action, and to desire is to possess. Here it is possible to create a world in the image of its producer, and fill it with agents who play the parts that he had designed in the manner that he had appointed. While such a work is in progress,

> "The dangerous passions hold aloof
> Far from the sacred, growing woof;"

and the mind aims at a state of serenity, and enjoys a peace which only the student can apprehend. Here only can those divine conditions be reached which the Roman and Egyptian voluptuaries vainly thought they had secured. Here the soul communicates with higher powers, and receives inspirations and revelations not granted to the lower faculties and organs that operate in the fields of sensible and animal experience. Here it expatiates in dreams of a past or future Paradise. "Hence," says Wordsworth,

> "Hence, in a season of calm weather,
> Though inland far we be,
> Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
> That brought us hither;
> Can in a moment travel thither,
> And see the children sport upon the shore,
> And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore."

Such a contemplatist is Prospero—a lofty and

serenely-minded man, whose soul breathes the pure air of conscience, and lives on angels' food. And what if in him we may see "the very Shakspere himself, as it were, of the *Tempest*"? Such is Coleridge's remark, and it contains, I think, more truth than he meant it to convey. If in any character that he has drawn, Shakspere has certainly portrayed himself in this; as a student and as a man—a prince, a husband, a father, and a brother.* In the story that he tells his daughter, Prospero describes his dukedom as, in former time, the first among "all the signiories," and "for the liberal arts without a parallel," adding:

> "Those being all my study,
> The government I cast upon my brother,
> And to my state grew stranger, being transported
> And wrapt in secret studies."
> "I pray thee mark me.
> I thus neglecting worldly ends, all dedicated
> To closeness, and the bettering of my mind
> With that, which but by being so retired
> O'erprized all popular rate, in my false brother

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* Did Shakspere act the part of Prospero himself, and speak the epilogue with which the play concludes? The supposition gives strange significancy to the lines:

> "Now my charms are all o'erthrown,
> And what strength I have 's my own,
> Which is most faint: now, 'tis true,
> I must be here confined by you,
> Or sent to Naples. Let me not,
> Since I have my dukedom got,
> And pardoned the deceiver, dwell
> In this bare island by your spell;
> But release me from my bands
> With the help of your good hands:
> Gentle breath of yours my sails
> Must fill, or else my projects fails,
> Which was to please."

> Awaked an evil nature—
> To have no screen between this part he played,
> And him he played it for, he needs will be
> Absolute Milan. Me, poor man! my library
> Was dukedom large enough."

The liberal arts, secret studies, closeness and the bettering of his mind, his library—these the prosperous Shakspere had now learned to prize more than his dukedom, more than the theatre which he had long governed; and these, in his later works, he regards more than their popularity. With a thorough mastery over his materials and purposes, he had now during the last few years written to please himself; no longer engaged in improving the works of others, but solely occupied with subjects freely chosen by himself, and trusting to his own mental and moral resources for their illustration and execution. "He had," says Coleridge, "virtually surveyed all the great component powers and impulses of human nature—had seen that their different combinations and subordinations were in fact the individualisers of men, and showed how their harmony was produced by reciprocal disproportions of excess or deficiency. The *language in which these truths are expressed was not drawn from any set fashion, but from the profoundest depths of his moral being, and is therefore for all ages.*"

The entire drama of *The Tempest* is a picture of the Inner Life of Shakspere, and its sublime materials are drawn from no other source. The kindly spirit of the man breathes through every line of that exquisite colloquy between Prospero and Miranda—he so gentle, she so innocent. It introduces to us

another kindly spirit, the "noble Neapolitan, Gonzalo," who, on the occasion of their sad exile, "being then appointed master of the design," did give them food and water, with

> "Rich garments, linens, stuffs, and necessaries,
> Which since have steaded much;"

and also, "knowing he loved his books," furnished Prospero, "from his own library, with volumes that he prized above his dukedom;" and thus furnished, father and daughter arrived at the island which by magic he had since subdued to his rule. That fine ethereal creation, Ariel, and that earth-born concretion, Caliban, are in their contrast evidences of the profound philosophy of Shakspere as manifested in his mature works. One of these is supernatural, but neither human; the former composed of the rarest elements, the latter of the grossest. To the former, Prospero had intrusted the performance of the mock tempest by which his enemies who had exiled him from Milan had suffered shipwreck on his enchanted shores, and were thus brought within his power. Of Ariel's quality his actions best speak:

> "I boarded the king's ship; now on the beak,
> Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin,
> I flamed amazement: sometimes I'd divide,
> And burn in many places; on the topmast,
> The yards and bowsprit, would I flame distinctly,
> Then meet and join. Jove's lightnings, the precursors
> O' the dreadful thunder-claps, more momentary
> And sight-outrunning were not: the fire, and cracks
> Of sulphurous roaring the most mighty Neptune
> Seem to besiege, and make his bold waves tremble,
> Yea, his dread trident shake."

This phantom is entirely the product of Shakspere's

rich imagination, who having to provide a certain work, invented a being equal to the task. What place he holds in any possible mythology we care not; suffice it that he has his right one in this glorious drama, which is all made out of the finest tissues of the poet's brain. In it such is the unity of interest maintained, so well distinguished and subordinated are the characters, and so thoroughly appropriate is the style to the subject, that so perfect an illusion is excited in the spectator or reader that he willingly accepts as familiar, incidents which have just been created for the nonce, and as real or actual, persons and events in what is but altogether and purely an offspring of the creative intellect, and exclusively dependent on the conception and union of the several parts, contributed by the imagination of the poet to the complete production of an harmonious and picturesque whole.

Equally fitted to his place in the general action is Caliban, the mis-shaped progeny of "the blue-eyed hag" and "damned witch Sycorax," whose power and malice were such, that she was able to imprison the delicate Ariel within the rift of a cloven pine, where he remained a dozen years, notwithstanding the death of his tormentor, after which he was released by the more powerful enchantments of Prospero. It is this service which makes Ariel so obedient to Prospero; but he is swayed more by fear than gratitude, a fact which excites Prospero's anger. And here let it be remarked what necessities belong to dramatic characterisation. Although Shakspere

would not exhibit Prospero with his clear spiritual will and power obscured and turmoiled by the sensual passions and appetites that made the lives of Antony and Cleopatra "a storm whereon they rode;" yet, had he depicted his benevolent magician as basking perpetually in the sunshine of an open conscience, and uninterruptedly serene, we should have had a being elevated so far above the condition of humanity, that we could not have sympathised with him. He therefore presents him as chafed with certain obstacles in the magic sphere of his working, and as occasionally wroth with Ariel and Caliban for resistance expressed or implied. He is also liable to perturbation of mind from forgetfulness, as in the fourth act, when, having been busy with the pageants that he had prepared for the delectation of the lovers, he starts up suddenly, exclaiming,

"I had forgot that foul conspiracy
Of the beast Caliban, and his confederates,
Against my life; the minute of their plot
Is almost come. Well done! Avoid; no more!
Fer. This is strange; your father's in some passion
That works him strongly.
Mira. Never till this day
Saw I him touched with anger so distempered.
Pro. You do look, my son, in a moved sort,
As if you were dismayed: be cheerful, sir.
Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this unsubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff

> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep. Sir, I am vexed:
> Bear with my weakness; my old brain is troubled:
> Be not disturbed with my infirmity.
> If you be pleased, retire into my cell,
> And there repose: a turn or two I'll walk,
> To still my beating mind."

And thus, with all his moral excellence, Prospero is made to awaken our sympathy for a natural imperfection. Meanwhile, all has the wonderful coherence and mystery of a dream.

Caliban is the symbol of the natural man, not wholly ignorant, because taught the use of language, but uninstructed in science. With the strange instinct of those who have not acquired the use of letters, he conceives a mystery in books, as the source of all the power possessed by those who read them. He is emphatic, therefore, in his entreaties to his scarcely more human confederates, to secure Prospero's books. "Without them," says the mystified monster,

> "He's but a sot, as I am, nor has not
> One spirit to command."

It is after the same fashion that the unlearned in science regard its occult qualities. Ignorant of the laws and properties of natural forces, many have supposed a latent quality in objects, an acquaintance with which gave the student power over the invisible world. The best-instructed philosopher, indeed, must recognise limits to all possible knowledge. The sensible world is to him a world of effects only; but beyond them, and the time or space which they appear to inhabit, he dimly apprehends a spiritual

universe of causes, without which the phenomena that he perceives would have no subsistence. Even to Prospero, therefore, there is a spirit-world at the back of the objective, the tenants of which are preternatural, but not without resemblance to the human spirit, and like it intelligent. This has been the faith of poets in all ages; that of the Hebrew and the Greek, as well as that of the Latin and Italian poets, and their successors or contemporaries in France and England. Shakspere, in making this assumption, proceeded as much in the spirit of the philosopher as in that of the poet. An interval of scepticism had thrown doubt on this assumption; but a more modern philosophy has restored to reason, free-will, and conscience their rightful preëminence, and the philosophy of Shakspere is again triumphant. We now look for a reason in nature responsive to that within ourselves,

"Bright Effluence of bright Essence increate."

Nature truly is the exponent of noumena; but as these are invisible and unknowable both to the learned and the ignorant, the imagination treats them as mysterious agents, and shapes these "airy nothings" according to its pleasure. Shakspere was too profound a philosopher to accept any theory as certain; and as a poet, preferred to project them as creatures of his own mind, rather than to adopt them on the authority of others.

Prospero, however, is supposed to be capable of penetrating the arcana of objective causes, so as both to perceive and to know them; and is therefore equally an imaginary person with the spirits that

he evokes. He likewise is a creature of the poet's mind, such as he would conceive a person endowed with extraordinary potency to have been.

The group of characters we are now considering, however, is not complete until it includes Ferdinand, the Neapolitan king's son, whom Ariel is commissioned to entice, by music in the air, into the company of Miranda. Wandering in search of his companions, wrecked like himself in the tempest, he is guided by the music to the spot where he sees the maiden, and conceives for her love at first sight. But Prospero is fearful that she may be too easily won, and uses his magic to raise apparent difficulties, by which the prize may acquire more value in the eyes of the ardent lover.

The second act opens with the King and his attendants, on another part of the island, speculating on their recent escape and the loss of Ferdinand. The good Gonzalo seeks to comfort the bereaved monarch, and is mocked by the wicked Antonio and Sebastian. The latter spares not the sovereign himself, but bitterly uses the privileges of a brother. In the course of the dialogue Gonzalo delivers a discourse concerning the sort of government he would bestow on the island; in which it is remarkable that Shakspere avoids the political doctrines of his time, and contents himself simply with such topics as would naturally present themselves in the course of harmless badinage. But Ariel puts a stop to this talk, by playing invisibly solemn music, which sends them all to sleep, except Sebastian and Antonio, the wicked

brother who had supplanted Prospero: and he takes advantage of the opportunity to incite Sebastian to assassinate the King and Gonzalo, that on their return to Naples he may usurp the throne. But Ariel prevents the crime by awakening the sleepers with his music.

The next scene presents us with the third group of characters—the sailors of the King's ship, who fall in with Caliban, and make him and themselves drunk. One of these, Trinculo, loves his jest, the other, Stephano, his bottle. Some excellent fooling is obtained from the simplest assumptions. Clowns as they are, to Caliban they appear as celestials, and he is willing to worship one of them as his god. Earthy as had been his origin, there is an inherent piety in Caliban; and malignant as he is, there is still poetry in his nature. His language is exceedingly figurative throughout. The savage has not fallen so low as the debased civilised man.

These groups are kept distinct throughout the play, and form three separate plots, which coalesce in the catastrophe. The loves of Ferdinand and Miranda are watched over by Prospero, while Ariel takes care of Caliban and the sailors, whose conspiracy already mentioned he discloses to his master. Both Prospero and Ariel then pursue the King and his attendants, and by the vision of a banquet manage to awaken remorse in him, Antonio, and Sebastian, for the wrong done to the exiled duke:

> "You three
> From Milan did supplant good Prospero;
> Exposed unto the sea (which hath requit it)

> Him and his innocent child; for which foul deed
> The powers, delaying, not forgetting, have
> Incensed the seas and shores, yea, all the creatures,
> Against your peace."

"Delaying, not forgetting;" a similar phrase occurs in *Antony and Cleopatra*, where Menecrates says of the gods,

> "That what they do delay, they not deny."

Here not only is identity of authorship denoted, but proximity of composition. No great interval took place between the writing of the two plays, of which a reminiscence of one thus survives in the other. It is clear from the internal evidence that the passage in *Antony and Cleopatra* was first written, for it contains the proposition, and *The Tempest* only the application which tacitly refers to it. This, indeed, would amount to an apodictical demonstration, but that the proposition itself has a classical origin.

The scene which opens the fourth act is like one in a lost Paradise; and the admonition given by Prospero to Ferdinand, when pronouncing the betrothal between him and Miranda, has, I have no doubt, reference to some glosses on the story of The Fall in Genesis, familiar enough to readers of patristic and mythical literature. The occurrence of the passage itself, it may be justly urged, is a sufficient proof of the falsehood of the calumnies which have been too frequently repeated, as to the probable intercourse between Shakspere and Anne Hathaway during the period of their betrothal. The poet, with the nice sense of honour evident in this speech, never in this respect offended against law and custom. Had he

done so, he would not have recorded this condemnation of his own conduct, but rather some apology for it. On the contrary, he seems not only to have written the passage with a right feeling, but with a clear conscience. Never was a man so wronged by his biographers, who, because they had really no facts to relate, have not been ashamed to invent such as were disgraceful, instead of studying the poet's character from his writings.

Now all goes on smoothly. Ariel having misled Caliban and his drunken friends into "the filthy-mantled pool," betrays them into the power of Prospero, by exciting their cupidity for some glittering apparel hung on a line opposite the good magician's cell. The King and his followers too are, as it were, mesmerised by Prospero's magic, and brought within a circle, where they stand charmed. They are, as the text informs us, "spell-stopped." Gradually they recover their senses; meanwhile Prospero changes his attire, and puts on his ducal garments, and is ready to welcome them to his island as soon as they are able to recognise his person:

> "Behold, sir king,
> The wronged Duke of Milan, Prospero:
> For more assurance that a living prince
> Does now speak to thee, I embrace thy body;
> And to thee, and thy company, I bid
> A hearty welcome."

Such is the reception the kind-hearted Duke gives to King Alonzo and his friend Gonzalo. It is amusing to reflect on the manner in which this recognition would have been converted into a great situation by

the modern playwright. Instead of this generous surrender on the part of Prospero, our skilful caterer would have furnished him with recapitulations, rebukes, and reproaches, until, perfectly convinced and subdued, his poor victims had confessed his final triumph and authority. Prospero indeed does rebuke Sebastian and Antonio, and lets them understand that he is aware of their treacherous practices, demanding at the same time the resignation from the latter of his dukedom. In time Ferdinand is restored to his father, who of course approves of his marriage with Miranda. The rest of the ship's crew are then produced uninjured, and the ship herself, "in all her trim," is restored to her owners:

> "As tight, and yare, and bravely rigged, as when
> They first put out to sea."

From this point Prospero surrenders his supernatural claims, and sets free alike the "delicate Ariel" and the "mis-shapen Caliban." This "demi-devil (for he 's a bastard one)" is not all lost; for in the end he acknowledges his master's greatness, and his folly in having mistaken Stephano for a divinity. Prospero sets him a redeeming service:

> "Go, sirrah, to my cell;
> Take with you your companions: as you look
> To have my pardon, trim it handsomely.
> *Cal.* Ay, that I will; and I'll be wise hereafter,
> And seek for grace. What a thrice-double ass
> Was I, to take this drunkard for a god,
> And worship this dull fool!"

The Epilogue spoken by Prospero, and perhaps by Shakspere himself in the character, concludes devoutly. The references are, as usual with Shakspere,

religious, demonstrating his theological tendency, and his acquaintance with the Scriptures:

> "Now I want
> Spirits to enforce, art to enchant;
> And my ending is despair,
> *Unless I be relieved by prayer;*
> *Which pierces so, that it assaults*
> *Mercy itself, and frees all faults.*
> *As you from crimes would pardoned be,*
> *Let your indulgence set me free.*"

What a solemn adjuration to a theatrical audience, as a plea to permit a play to be successful! Shakspere evidently thought his art to be sacred, and regarded *The Tempest* as a sacred poem. In its regularity, beauty of diction, music of verse, facile development, and completeness of action, it is one of his most perfect works. It is the last that received his finishing touches. The two dramas that remain for consideration are evidently in a crude state, and have not been subject to revision.

Perhaps by the Epilogue Shakspere meant to convey a farewell to his audience, and even then projected a retirement from the theatre, and a return to Stratford. Graceful, however, as would have been such a conclusion to his labours, Shakspere lingered still near the scene of his triumphs and accepted more work.

In the *Accounts of the Revels at Court* we find an entry relative to this drama, 1st November 1611. "By the King's players. Hallomas nyght was presented att Whithall before the Kinges Ma^tie^ a play called *The Tempest*." On the 5th of the same month, there is a similar entry as to *The Winter Nightes*

Tayle. In the same year the fourth and fifth editions of *Hamlet* were printed, with the author's name, "for John Smethwicke." *Titus Andronicus* also appeared in a second edition, but anonymously; a proof that it was not then accepted as Shakspere's.*

Little less abstract and intellectual in its theme and treatment than *The Tempest* is Shakspere's next tragedy, *Timon of Athens.* This drama is singularly deficient in female character, and presents woman in her most unamiable phase. Of sexual passion nothing is introduced; and so free, in a general way, is the play from passion of any kind, that, if deprived of the ethical element, scarcely any source of interest would remain. If we may accept *The Tempest* as a mystery, *Timon* might stand as a morality.

The subject of *Timon* was familiar to Shakspere's contemporaries, and had been previously dramatised; but Shakspere found the sketch of his life and character in Plutarch sufficiently suggestive. He may have derived, however, some assistance from Lucian's dialogue, and probably did, though we can trace no translation of it to his time. The style of Shakspere's tragedy is decidedly ironical; for the poet had now completed and survived the entire circle of the pas-

* Two other entries belong to the same year. Thus in a list of donations "colected towards the charge of prosecutyng the bill in parliament for the better repaire of the high waies, and amendinge divers defects in the statutes already made, Wednesdaye the xjth of September 1611," the name of "Mr. William Shackspere" is found. And in Trinity Term 1611, a fine was levied upon the property, and upon twenty acres of pasture-land more, which William Shakspere had bought from William and John Combe in May 1602.

sions—perhaps both as an artist and as a man. There is a bitterness in the vein of its satire that contrasts rather painfully with his other works; and his Timon is in all respects the opposite of Prospero. The circumstances are similar under which both suffer, but the spirit exhibited in consequence of the pressure is very different: sweet odours are crushed out of the one; but the other resents adversity as a wrong, and would inflict its reaction on society. Timon in Shakspere's drama, however, is more amiable than in Lucian's dialogue. At the commencement of the play we are permitted to see little else than the high-spirited nobleman, and the generous patron of whatever is worthy. The poet, the painter, the jeweller, the merchant, are alike basking in the sunshine of his favour. "See," exclaims the first,

> "Magic of bounty! all these *spirits* thy power
> Hath *conjured* to attend."

Shakspere has not yet forgotten the associations of *The Tempest*, but indeed opens his new play with its language. Prospero's *magic* and his attendant *spirits* still occupy his mind. Timon also is a *conjuror*. And we shall do well to see Shakspere in the poet who thus speaks. Amidst the crowd he is still alone, and meditates his future compositions. These are his thoughts:

> "When we for recompense have praised the vile,
> It stains the glory in that happy verse
> Which aptly sings the good."

Overheard and observed, he replies, in answer to the painter's remarks, that he is studying some dedication to Lord Timon:

> "A thing slipped idly from me.
> Our poesy is as a gum, which issues
> From whence 'tis nourished: the fire i' the flint
> Shows not till it be struck; our gentle flame
> Provokes itself, and, like the current, flies
> Each bound it chafes."

We have here the same man who, in the *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, describes "the poet's eye," and the creative power of the imagination. The habit and method of poetic composition is here correctly intimated. The true poet, while engaged in the ordinary business of life, is still prosecuting within his soul another task, and the great work for which he was born is still growing within him. Every where, however occupied, the current flows spontaneously from the vital spring within; and, cherished by the memory, to which the rhythm and metre contribute facilities, is available for after-use. Your genuine poet sits not down at a library-table to task-work, with the intention of producing so many verses in a day, but carries his theme with him into the open air, the haunts of men, the market-place, the court, and the church; and thus, being inwardly irritated, it grows invisibly, and is sacredly garnered until he can return unto his quiet chamber, retire into himself, exclude the world, and call home his thoughts in order to secure it on the written page. It is printed first on the living tablets of his heart, before it is committed to those of a senseless book. And thus we can imagine Shakspere, among men but not of them, moving mechanically in the midst of affairs that exhaust all the energies of meaner minds, and

bearing, as we know he did, his share of the task-work, while his soul was actively engaged in those creative processes of which his marvellous poems and dramas were the sublime and beautiful exponents.

Shakspere's poet, out of the opulence of his genius, repays the painter for his sympathy with the richest commendation:

"Let's see your piece.
Painter. 'Tis a good piece.
Poet. So 'tis; this comes off well, and excellent.
Painter. Indifferent.
Poet. Admirable! How this grace
Speaks his own standing; what a mental power
This eye shoots forth; how big imagination
Moves in this lip; to the dumbness of the gesture
One might interpret.
Painter. It is a pretty mocking of the life.
Here is a touch; is't good?
Poet. I'll say of it
It tutors nature: artificial strife
Lives in these touches livelier than life."

To this poet, also, Shakspere intrusts the statement of the exordium or argument of the drama before the action commences, in the following gorgeous passages; thus giving an epic character to the succeeding work:

"*Poet.* You see this confluence, this great flood of visitors.
I have in this rough work shaped out a man,
Whom this beneath world doth embrace and hug
With amplest entertainment: my free drift
Halts not particularly, but moves itself
In a wide sea of verse: no levelled malice
Infects one comma in the course I hold,
But flies an eagle-flight, bold, and forth on,
Leaving no tract behind.
Painter. How shall I understand you?
Poet. I will unbolt to you.
You see how all conditions, how all minds,

(As well of glib and slippery creatures, as
Of grave and austere quality) tender down
Their services to Lord Timon: his large fortune,
Upon his good and gracious nature hanging,
Subdues, and properties to his love and tendance,
All sorts of hearts; yea, from the glass-faced flatterer
To Apemantus, that few things loves better
Than to abhor himself: even he drops down
The knee before him, and returns in peace
Most rich in Timon's nod.

Painter. I saw them speak together.

Poet. Sir, I have upon a high and pleasant hill
Feigned Fortune to be throned: the base of the mount
Is ranked with all deserts, all kinds of natures,
That labour on the bosom of this sphere
To propagate their states; amongst them all,
Whose eyes are on this sovereign lady fixed,
One do I personate of Lord Timon's frame;
Whom Fortune with her ivory hand wafts to her,
Whose present grace to present slaves and servants
Translates his rivals.

Painter. 'Tis conceived to scope,
This throne, this Fortune, and this hill, methinks,
With one man beckoned from the rest below,
Bowing his head against the steepy mount
To climb his happiness, would be well expressed
In our condition.

Poet. Nay, sir, but hear me on.
All those which were his fellows but of late
(Some better than his value), on the moment
Follow his strides; his lobbies fill with tendance,
Rain sacrificial whisperings in his ear,
Make sacred even his stirrup, and through him
Drink the free air.

Painter. Ay, marry, what of these?

Poet. When Fortune, in her shift and change of mood,
Spurns down her late beloved, all his dependents,
Which laboured after him to the mountain's top,
Even on their knees and hands, let him slip down,
Not one accompanying his declining foot.

Painter. 'Tis common:
A thousand moral paintings I can show,
That shall demonstrate these quick blows of Fortune's
More pregnantly than words. Yet you do well

To show Lord Timon that: mean eyes have seen
The foot above the head."

In this exordium the reader will perceive that the poet has provided a place for Apemantus from the first. Intending to paint the misanthrope in the ultimate character of Timon, this, as the idea of his poem, requires more than one conception or person for its full expression. Timon becomes a cynic from ill-usage, Apemantus is one from choice. Timon draws his portrait and his own accurately in this passage:

"Thou art a slave, whom Fortune's tender arm
With favour never clasped, but bred a dog;
Hadst thou, like us, from our first swath, proceeded
The sweet degrees that this brief world affords
To such as may the passive dregs of it
Freely command, thou wouldst have plunged thyself
In general riot; melted down thy youth
In different beds of lust; and never learned
The icy precepts of respect, but followed
The sugared game before thee."

This contrast furnishes the two sides of the question. To complete the triad expedient in all such cases, we have the Athenian general Alcibiades, whose services having been forgotten, and he banished for too warmly pleading a friend's cause, the like inducement operates with him to take up arms against his country. Alcibiades, like Timon, hates man because of his ingratitude, but Apemantus because his birth was ignoble.

It is in the introduction of Alcibiades that the incompleteness of this drama becomes manifest. In the third act, after little acquaintance with him, we find him before the senate pleading his friend's cause; that friend unnamed, and his story simply suggested. In the two preceding acts there was plenty of room for

the full development of this underplot, that the dramatist partly occupied with miscellaneous matter, such as that of Lucilius with the old Athenian and his daughter, which has no sequel in the subsequent conduct of the tragedy. It is obvious that the story of Alcibiades and his friend would have fitlier occupied this space. Here, then, we may see that so far Shakspere has only provided a few materials for a drama, and a provisional disposition for them, but that the work had yet scenes to be written, and the rounding-off of the whole to be supplied.

The third act concludes the first cycle of the intended tragedy. The final scene is evidently in a state of great incompleteness. Instead of the persons who had already appeared on the scene, we have a set of nameless lords to whom the speeches are given. In fact, the scene is merely a skeleton, and in a thoroughly unrehearsed state.

With the fourth act commences the second cycle, and this is in a yet ruder state than the first. Self-exiled Timon opens it, and turns back on the walls of Athens, uttering terrible maledictions. Within his desolate house, the steward and other servants unite in lamenting the fall of their lord, and moralising on the vanity of riches. Then we have Timon in the woods soliloquising misanthropically; he digs, and finds gold. The drum and fife now sound at a distance, and anon Alcibiades enters with followers, including two harlots, marching against Athens. So changed is Timon in appearance, that the general at first fails to recognise his former feaster. On being

asked his name, Timon replies, "I am Misanthropos, and hate mankind;" and then proceeds to the grossest vituperation; but in the end he makes him partake of the gold that he has discovered. He showers it also into the lap of the two women, with words expressive of utter loathing and contempt. This is followed by a colloquy with Apemantus, who traces him to the desert, and is led by vanity to contemplate the once rich man who men report has affected his manners. But Timon soon shows his superiority to the cynic, and strips him bare of his artificial mental habit. There is some strong writing in the scene; but it is too evident that the finishing hand has not smoothed the verses, nor balanced the sentences, nor set nor polished the gems, but heaped them together without selection or arrangement, with stones of little value, and some rubble of none.

After the departure of the cynic, Timon is visited by banditti, to whom he scatters both gold and poetry, replete with classical illustrations of theft; then follows his faithful steward, whose behaviour naturally touches his poor transformed master with remorse and pity. Nevertheless, he drives him away from him, and so the fourth act ends.

The fifth act continues the same kind of morbid interest. The Poet and Painter, also, visit the cave of the now rich misanthrope, who, though he have gold, will only subsist on roots. Shakspere sadly drops these characters down, and needlessly degrades them; they are thoroughly corrupted by the world, and are no longer artists, but mercenaries. They are

attracted solely by the prospect of gold; and for this Timon justly calls them villains, and beats them out like dogs. But they are not the men of the first act, nor types of the professions that they represent. They are such as Timon, with his perverted heart, would have them—not such as Shakspere, had he ever revised this rough copy of his piece, would have drawn them. In the next place, the guilty senators arrive to request the return of Timon to Athens; for which pains of theirs he requites them with sarcasms and curses. And now Shakspere grows weary of this monotonous situation, and Timon retires to die unseen. But the drama does not end; we still have three incongruous scenes, by which Alcibiades and his troops are conducted to a tombstone erected by Timon to himself, and inscribed with a wretched epitaph. In all this there is no attempt at dramatic structure, or an effective catastrophe, but only two or three jottings or sketches available for a work in progress, but not presenting it in a complete state. Indeed, the traces of weariness in the writer are painfully evident. The subject, obviously, went against the grain of Shakspere's gentle nature; and the entire drama would have received much modifying manipulation from his thoughtful care and skill, if the author had lived to undertake its publication. In its present state, it should be accepted as a number of fragments, some of them fitted to their place in the intended complete work, some meant to be cancelled and substituted by others less crude, and amended by the operation of second thought.

About the period of the composition of this tragedy, Shakspere began to feel sorrow. Death had removed both his parents and his son, and had now taken his brother Richard. This event must have happened about the time that Shakspere was engaged upon the concluding scenes of the drama, which probably was thrown by in consequence, and not resumed for further consideration. Shakspere had now no male successor to his name—an object which, as we find from his Sonnets, lay always near his heart. Though his dearest hopes had thus been shattered, he was, however, still diligent in business, since we find him on March 10, 1612, purchasing a house with ground attached near Blackfriars Theatre for the price of 140*l.*, eighty pounds of which he paid down, and mortgaged the property for the balance. The deed is preserved in a glass case in the city of London Corporation Library, Guildhall.

From the neglected state in which the tragedy of *Timon* was left, the players appear to have taken some liberties with it. Coleridge points out one passage as evidently corrupt in the servant's speech, act iii. sc. 3, where, after saying, "How fairly this lord strives to appear foul! takes virtuous copies to be wicked,"—he adds, "like those that under hot ardent zeal would set whole realms on fire. Of such a nature is his politic love." This allusion Coleridge conceives, lugged in as it is by the head and shoulders, more likely to have been added in the reign of Charles I. than to have been written by Shakspere; and if we remember and rightly appreciate how in Malvolio and other ex-

amples Shakspere rather substitutes the abstract conception than inserts the character of the Puritan, we shall, I think, concur in his judgment.

The subject of *Timon* bears a certain relation to that of *Henry VIII.*, which shows how closely one drama is linked to another in the order of production, and how traceable their chronological succession is, if we but consider a little the Inner Life by which they are inspired. The description given by the poet of the instability of Fortune in *Timon*, would suit just as well for the argument of *Henry VIII.*, nay, better. The poet describes that instability as the normal condition of fortune, without reference either to Timon's previous prodigality or sequent misanthropy. Now such instability it is, purely considered, which is taken as the key-note for the action of the tragedy of *Henry VIII.* It is, in fact, the one theme of the play. In the Prologue, too, it is expressly stated—in these terms:

> "Be sad as we would make ye; think ye see
> The very persons of our noble story,
> As they were living; *think you see them great,*
> And followed with the general throng and sweat
> Of thousand friends; *then in a moment see*
> *How soon this mightiness meets misery.*"

The reign of Henry VIII. presented the elements of political change at their crisis, and hence the mutations of fortune to which the subjects of that monarch were liable, and on which the action of the drama is founded. First, we have the Duke of Buckingham confronting Wolsey, and before the scene concludes arrested for a traitor. In the next act he is executed.

In the second scene of the first we have Queen Katharine high in influence with her husband, and enabled to carry her point against the proud cardinal himself. In the next act the bluff monarch is contriving the means for her divorce; and before the third she is on her trial. In the third, Wolsey still retains authority at the beginning, but at the end is stripped of all, and retires to die. In the fourth act poor Queen Katharine makes her final exit, Anne Bullen having already received the crown which once belonged to herself. The fifth act is occupied with the baptism of the infant Elizabeth, and the establishment of the Protestant bishop Cranmer. Nor are these violent changes only in persons, but in things. In the third scene of the first act the philosophical poet describes those that were taking place in the fashions. They form the theme of the merry Lord Sands' discourse. So far had the imitation of French foppery and frippery proceeded, that a new proclamation is exhibited on the court-gate, commanding

> "The reformation of our travelled gallants,
> That fill the court with quarrels, talk, and tailors.
> *Lord Chamberlain.* I am glad 'tis there: now I would pray our monsieurs
> To think an English courtier may be wise,
> And never see the Louvre.
> *Lovell.* They must either
> (For so run the conditions) leave those remnants
> Of fool and feather, that they got in France,
> With all their honourable points of ignorance
> Pertaining thereunto, as fights and fireworks;
> Abusing better men than they can be,
> Out of a foreign wisdom; renouncing clean
> The faith they have in tennis, and tall stockings,
> Short blistered breeches, and those types of travel,

> And understand again like honest men,
> Or pack to their old playfellows; then, I take it,
> They may *cum privilegio* wear away
> The legend of their lewdness, and be laughed at."

Such is, in fact, the close of the grand cycle described in the British historical plays on which Shakspere had bestowed so much diligence and skill. He had traced the development of our political state from almost the founding of the Plantagenet line to the birth of Elizabeth. With the death of Stephen terminated a chaotic condition of things, out of which a new order was to be created. The barons in his reign had resisted royal authority, and to Henry II. had Providence intrusted the task of restoring the proper limits of their influence. But not only they, but the clergy had urged their claims to the utmost, and these impinged as much on the privileges of the nobles as on the authority of the monarch. The Crown and the Aristocracy, therefore, united against the ambition of Churchmen, and the contest was carried on violently until the assassination of Becket in Canterbury Cathedral. This untoward event was for the time more injurious to the royal cause than to that of the Church, and compromised the King with the Pope, from whom, however, he gained his consent for the conquest of Ireland, which he subsequently effected.

Of this king, John was the favourite son, and he inherited the troubles of his father. He had to settle both the claims of his barons and the Church, and by him Magna Charta was granted, as well as the Pope resisted. Shakspere, with poetic wisdom, took a more

favourable view of this monarch's character than historians have generally conceded. His philosophy taught him that the country was as much on its trial as its sovereign, and therefore he identified both. What the chronicler describes as the treachery and violence of the King, the poet regards as the inevitable struggles of the country to attain a normal condition. To neutralise the dangers that threatened England from without, internal peace was needful; and this truth forms the moral of the tragedy of *King John.*

More than a century and a half has elapsed before our poet again deals with the history of his country. During that interval, law had grown more respectable, commerce more safe, and Wales had been added to England; but the spirit of war was still dominant, and men pursued glory in preference to virtue and the arts of peace. Shakspere resumed the treatment of the cycle with the closing reign; and the tragedy of *Richard II.* assumes all that had occurred since the reign of John. The limits of royal prerogative had now to be considered, and Richard had to debate the question in his own person. We have shown how, notwithstanding appearances to the contrary, Shakspere had decided the controversy against him, and in favour of his successor.

Meanwhile a reformation in religion had commenced. The voice of Wycliffe had been heard in the land, and the King became a persecutor of the Lollards. The House of Lancaster had undertaken the heavy charge of remedying the evils caused by

this change of affairs, and of establishing a new dynasty for the benefit of the people. Here was a large and important argument for dramatic illustration, and Shakspere applied to it the best powers of his mind. In dealing with the mighty subject, he freed himself from the narrow limits of the mere chronicle-play, arranging the historic incidents in the manner best calculated to furnish a proper illustration of the political principles involved, and introducing comic characters so as to add to the dramatic interest of the composition. In the three plays which he has devoted to this cycle of events (*Henry IV. Parts I. and II.* and *Henry V.*), he was careful to bestow an artistic form on his materials, the result evidently of much meditation. The advantage gained to the cause of historical drama was evident from the first, and the poet rose to the highest reputation in consequence.

The following reign, that of *Henry VI.*, had been already treated in dramas more or less adopted by Shakspere, and in these dramas the chronicle arrangement had prevailed.

And now the House of York was to undertake or rather to inaugurate what that of Lancaster had failed to perform. This subject enabled Shakspere to demonstrate his originality as a dramatist. As already shown, *Richard III.* is all of a piece; but the characters are exclusively historical; the poet had not yet ventured to introduce invented comic groups, as he did ultimately in those dramas in which Falstaff and his comrades are such prominent figures.

The House of Tudor followed, and was destined to succeed where the previous houses had failed. Its success Shakspere celebrated in *Henry VIII.* But in writing this tragedy Shakspere made no demand on his inventive powers. He went back to the method of the chronicle-play, and simply placed the events in their historical order, without relieving the subject by the intervention of comic characters. He was careful, however, that each important scene should present a great historical tableau, and thus distributed his subject in large masses; a circumstance which renders the tragedy a fitting vehicle for spectacular representation.

That it was originally designed by the poet for such a vehicle is indeed virtually stated in the Prologue:

> "I come no more to make you laugh: things now,
> That bear a weighty and a serious brow,
> Sad, high, and working, full of state and woe,
> Such noble scenes as draw the eye to flow,
> We now present. Those that can pity, here
> May, if they think it well, let fall a tear;
> The subject will deserve it. Such as give
> Their money out of hope they may believe,
> May here find *truth* too: those that come to see
> Only a show or two, and so agree
> The play may pass, if they be still and willing,
> I'll undertake may see away their shilling
> Richly in two short hours."

This is all that the poet proposed to do; wherefore neither regularity, nor unity of action, nor roundness of plot, are attributes of his last drama, which is simply a chronicle-play on an improved principle; superior in all respects to the *Three Parts of Henry VI.*, but inferior as a drama to both *Richard II.* and *Richard III.* In political importance, however, it excels them.

Throughout the series Shakspere shines as a constitutional statesman, no less than as a philosophical poet.

The tragedy of *Henry VIII.* appears to have been composed as an occasional play, and in honour of the marriage of the Princess Elizabeth, in February 1612. On the 29th June in the following year it was acted for the last time in Shakspere's life, on which occasion it appears to have borne the title of *All is True.* On that night the theatre was burned down during its performance. A letter of the period extant, under the signature of Thomas Lorkin, and dated "London, this last day of June 1613," states: "No longer since than yesterday, while Bourbege his companie were acting at the Globe the play of *Hen. VIII.*, and there shooting of certaine chambers in way of triumph, the fire catched and fastened upon the thatch of the house and there burned so furiously as it consumed the whole house, and all in lesse than two hours, the people having enough to doe to save themselves." The theatre was rebuilt at the charge of King James, and many of the nobles and gentry. But Shakspere seems to have availed himself of the opportunity, and to have retired from the stage. He returned to Stratford in 1612; and we have no record of his having written any thing subsequently. It has been supposed that in the conflagration many of Shakspere's manuscripts were consumed. It is not, however, probable that the theatre contained any other than fair copies of his works, or that it ever did contain the originals.

CONCLUSION.

CONCLUSION.

"Moreover, Ever-Good, thou minglest here heavenly things with earthly; afterwards soul and flesh both live together, earthly with heavenly, soul in flesh. Ever hence they strive upward to thee, because they came from thee, and yet again they all shall go to thee."

Such is a translation of the Saxon verses from King Alfred which appear as the epigraph on the title-page of the present volume. The wise monarch expresses here the true Saxon feeling. A reverence for woman, and a care for the body both before and after death, were the leading sentiments of the Saxon race. They were anxious that their ashes should rest as near as possible to the altars of churches, or to the remains of pious men, and were indeed as solicitous for the welfare of the lifeless body as if it were still the dwelling of the soul. Those whose office it was to minister to the latter had not yet raised themselves into a distinct class, having a divided interest from the rest of the community, and claiming privileges as spiritual persons which implied a disgust of all the doings and attributes of the flesh. The clergy were then not separated from the people, and dwelt like men with their fellow-men, instructing and consoling, but not overruling. Alfred made an effort, indeed, to improve their condition; for they required education almost as much as the peasantry. Thence-

forward they rose higher in public estimation; the cause of religion being moreover greatly advanced by the translation into the Saxon language of the Bible in the reign of Athelstan. At length the clergy affected superior sanctity, and practised austerities, which, so far from humbling them before their Maker, increased their pride toward men. The haughty Dunstan aspired to govern the realm, and behaved with such insolence towards Edwy, on his marriage with Elgiva, that the King was compelled to drive him from his court; but in vain, for the priests had now gained the ascendancy. They destroyed the beauty of the young queen, and doomed her to a death of torment. Dunstan became archbishop, and celibacy was enforced. The clergy naturally yielded themselves to a dissolute life; and this fact aided the despotism of the prelate, and that of King Edgar, who resigned himself to his counsel.

The system, so well suited to the fostering of tyranny ecclesiastical and temporal, proceeded for some time to demoralise England, which became unable to resist invasion, and submitted to Danish rule. Then came the Norman conquest, and priestly domination with a foreign king insulted and oppressed the native population. William Rufus, in his coronation-oath, promised, "Well to observe justice, equity, and mercy; to maintain the peace, liberties, and privileges of the Church, and to follow the Archbishop's counsel in his administration." The King, indeed, threw off the prelate's authority, but it was only to fall into the hands of a ruffian priest, who fostered

his passions for his own profit. Then came the Crusades, the result of religious enthusiasm conducted by fanaticism, which led to issues very little expected by their promoters.

While kings were yielding to the frenzy of the time in Palestine, public affairs in their different countries fell into confusion. In England we find the barons rising into influence, and alternately defying both the king and the clergy; until, under the sway of the Plantagenets, a new era was inaugurated.

The progress of things after this until the close of Henry VIII.'s reign is most lucidly and emphatically told in Shakspere's historical plays. We learn from them that he fully entered into the spirit of the Reformation, and as a constitutional politician was far in advance of his age. It has been said, upon the credit of a forged document, that Shakspere's father was a concealed Catholic. Such charges are but weak inventions of the enemy. The earliest writings of the son, as we have proved, were decidedly Protestant. One of his contemporary admirers says of him:

> "Who loves Adonis' love or Lucrece' rape,
> His sweeter verse contains heart-robbing life;
> Could but a graver subject him content,
> Without love's lazy foolish languishment."

To love, in various shapes, were all his early dramas devoted; and in praise of marriage he was at all times eloquent. It was in honour of marriage that his last tragedy was written; the subject of which related to the laws of marriage, and the contest between king and priest on that important argument.

The theatre having been consumed, Shakspere retired altogether to Stratford, whereto his visits had been frequent for some time previous. We have few traces of him during his retirement; but these show him to have been a busy man, whose advice and assistance were sought by his neighbours. He went backwards and forwards to London, and was engaged in some questions regarding the enclosures of common lands, in which he appears to have taken considerable interest. He seems also to have attended juries, and entertained "preachers at Newe Place." Meanwhile new editions of many of his dramas went through the press. And so matters progressed until 1616, when two purposes engrossed his attention—the making of his will, and the marriage of his youngest daughter Judith, which took place on 10th February in that year. On the 25th March he executed his will; and in the following April, it is believed on the 23d, died. Tradition says that he had been visited by Drayton and Ben Jonson, and that their meeting had been a merry one. This is probable; but not that Shakspere had contracted a fever from hard-drinking. The whole testimony of his life is against the supposition; that of his works certainly is. Who but he held forth Cassio as a warning to all those who would "put an enemy into their mouths to steal away their brains"? Wine with him was confessedly "a good familiar creature," but it was to be "well used." That he even suffered from a fever is, we shall find, scarcely probable; but it is possible that he had felt himself ailing for some time, and had in consequence projected his will; un-

less indeed his signing that document were connected with his daughter's marriage, and formed part of the pecuniary arrangements. Up to the last we note him as a careful prudent man, who left nothing to chance, and who was desirous of preserving the respectability of his family. The Stratford Burial-register has this entry: "1616, April 25. Will. Shakspere, *Gent.*" The body of the poet reposes in the chancel of the church of the Holy Trinity. A flat stone over it bears this epitaph:

> "Good frend, for Jesus sake forbeare
> To digg the dust enclosed heare;
> Blest be y^e^ man y^t^ spares these stones,
> And curst be he y^t^ moves my bones."

—an epitaph which, rude as it is, breathes a true Anglo-Saxon sentiment, and shows as much solicitude for the security of the body as if it had been written by King Alfred himself. On the north wall of the church, his monument bears these lines:

> "Judicio Pylium, genio Socratem, arte Maronem,
> Terra tegit, populus mœret, Olympus habet."
>
> "Stay, passenger, why goest thou by so fast?
> Read, if thou canst, whom envious Death hath plast
> Within this monument. Shakespeare, with whom
> Quick Nature dide: whose name doth deck this tombe
> Far more than cost; Sith all that he hath writt,
> Leaves living Art but page to serve his Witt.
> Obiit Ano Do^i^ 1616.
> Ætatis 53, die 23 Ap."

There certainly is a discrepancy between the epitaph on the stone and these lines on the wall, which it is difficult to reconcile. The monument itself enshrines a bust of Shakspere, under an entablature containing his arms and several devices of a mor-

tuary sort, within an arch between two black marble columns of Corinthian architecture. The bust represents the poet with a pen in his right hand, and his left resting on a scroll. It is the size of life, and is formed out of a block of soft stone. It was originally painted over, in imitation of nature. The hands and face were of a flesh-colour, the eyes of a light hazel, and the hair and beard auburn; the doublet, or coat, was scarlet, and covered with a loose black gown, or tabard, without sleeves. The upper part of the cushion was green, the under half crimson, and the tassels gilt. In this state it was preserved till 1793, when Malone, one of Shakspere's editors and commentators, had it coated with white paint, incurring thereby the censure of many:

> "Stranger, to whom this monument is shown,
> Invoke the Poet's curse upon Malone,
> Whose meddling zeal his barbarous taste displays,
> And daubs his tombstone as he mars his plays."

The bust is supposed to have been taken from a cast after death. If so, that Shakspere died of a fever is not probable, for the features are not at all emaciated, the face being full, ample, rounded, and healthy-looking. On the whole, it is a true English face, massive and intellectual; but its defects as a work of art prevent us from pronouncing decidedly on its specific merits in detail.

Anne Hathaway survived William Shakspere seven years. She died on 6th August 1623, and was buried beside her husband on the 8th of that month. Her tombstone bears a brass plate with the following inscription:

"Heere lyeth interred the body of Anne, wife of William Shakespeare, who derted this life the 6th day of Aug. 1623, being of the age of 67 yeares.

"Ubera tu, mater, tu lac vitamque dedisti:
Vae mihi, pro tanto munere saxa dabo.
Quam mallem amoveat lapidem bonus angelus ore,
Exeat ut Christi corpus imago tua.
Sed nil vota valent: venias, cito, Christe, resurget,
Clausa licet tumulo, mater et astra petet."

This epitaph, probably written by Dr. Hall, who married Shakspere's daughter Susanna, and which is apparently sincere, describes just such a wife as we have imagined for Shakspere in the previous pages.

Curiously enough, in the very year of her death, Shakspere's collected plays were published in the first folio edition. The question has often arisen, why they were not published long before?—nay, why were they not published during his life? His not having so published them has to some appeared a sublime or censurable indifference, or as if the modest poet were insensible to his own merits. This last the language of his Sonnets will not permit us to believe. The shortness of the time between the date of his last play and his death offers a more reasonable apology for the neglect. But the case is capable of a positive explanation. That Shakspere had no purpose of neglecting the preservation of his works, is clear from his having published some of his dramas, and in many of his editions contributed to their enlargement and correction. Those that remained in manuscript probably did so by express contract with the players. Stage-dramas were not in Shakspere's days regarded exactly as literature, but were the monopo-

lies of theatrical managers or companies. Those that were popular were profitable to these, and they were anxious to secure the exclusive privilege. Even after the publication of the first folio, the Red Bull Company, at the instance of Mr. Heminge, were prohibited by Sir Henry Herbert from performing Shakspere's plays. The players were therefore anxious to have the printing or publishing of the plays in which they were interested delayed as long as possible. Henslowe frequently staved-off the printing of a play piratically by a present of forty shillings; and Thomas Heywood complains of some of his plays being still retained in the hands of some actors, who think it against their peculiar profit to have them come into print. Booksellers, however, not seldom precipitated the publication of popular dramas. Even so late as 1637, the Master of the Revels was memorialised to restrain printers and stationers from "printing divers of their books of comedies and tragedies, which they had for their own use bought at high prices, and which the printers were for publishing, to the prejudice of the players; and from the corrupt state in which they were printed, to the injury and disgrace of the authors."

From these facts it is evident that the players held a property in Shakspere's and others' plays; and it is probable that he, both as author and actor, had a life-interest in them, which passed to his widow. On her death, the remaining proprietors proceeded to forestall the market, by printing their own authorised edition. This, as already stated, was in folio. Sepa-

rate quarto editions had appeared, at various dates, of several plays. These were, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Love's Labour's lost*, *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Lear*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Richard II.*, *Henry IV.* (the two parts), *Richard III.*, *Hamlet*, *Henry V.*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The First Part of the Contention between the Houses of York and Lancaster*, *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York* (*i. e.* the Second and Third parts of Henry VI.), and *The Yorkshire Tragedy*—of which, as spurious, I have taken no notice in the previous treatise. *Othello* was published in 1622, with a prefatory address to the reader by Thomas Walkley, who probably had a copyright interest in the work.

Shakspere had laboured thirteen years for the stage before his fame culminated; and his real history begins for us from the year 1598, when he was recognised by Meres as the author of about a dozen plays. Then it was that his name was placed on title-pages that had been previously anonymous. Other publications succeeded, which, like former ones, were subsequently enlarged and corrected. *Henry V.*, for instance, was first printed in 1600, and reprinted in 1602 and in 1608. Great differences exist between the earliest quarto and the folio editions. The first contains about 1,800 lines—the last 3,500. In the epilogue allusion is made to the trilogy of *Henry VI.*, as having been previously and frequently performed.

It may fairly be presumed, that if Shakspere had not died so prematurely and so suddenly, he would have provided for a collected edition of his works;

and some think that as much is implied in the "Dedication" and "Address" of the first folio, published in 1623, seven years after his own death. Ben Jonson's "Works" had been published in 1616; and these were the only two *collected* editions of dramas published up to that period. A second edition of the Shaksperian folio was published in 1632, with a few verbal alterations. A third was issued in 1664; this contained additional matter, viz. *Pericles*, *The London Prodigal*, *The History of Lord Cromwell*, *Sir John Oldcastle*, *Lord Cobham*, *The Puritan Widow*, *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, and *The Tragedy of Locrine*. None of these are now admissible among the genuine works of Shakspere.

This third edition was, except a few copies, consumed in the Great Fire of London, 1666. In regard to this fact Victor Hugo has made a strange mistake. He confounds this third edition with the first; and wishing to draw a parallel between the fire of London and that of the Alexandrian Library in which the complete works of Æschylus were consumed, incorrectly states that "Shakspere was so little printed, and printing existed so little for him, thanks to the silly indifference of his immediate posterity, that in 1666 there was still but one edition of the poet of Stratford-on-Avon, three hundred copies of which were printed. Shakspere (he continues) with this obscure and pitiful edition, waiting in vain for the public, was a sort of poor wretch ashamed to beg for glory. These three hundred copies were nearly all stored up in London when the fire of 1666 broke out.

It burnt London, and nearly burnt Shakspere. The whole edition of Hemynge and Condell disappeared, *with the exception of forty-four copies, which had been sold in fifty years!!* Those forty-four purchasers saved from death the work of Shakspere!!!"

Had the fact been correctly stated, this brilliant writer would have lost the opportunity of drawing an historical parallel and depicturing the incendiary Omar, mounted on a camel between two sacks filled with figs and corn, and decreeing the conflagration of the Library of Alexandria; and of course such a terrible contingency was not to be thought of. The sale of Shakspere's collected works during the forty-three (not fifty) years, must have been at least 644 copies, allowing 300 as the tale of the two previous editions.* In 1685 a fourth folio was published. It is a reprint of the third, but abounds in errors.

James II. was then king in England. The works of Shakspere had survived the convulsions of the interval. The principles advocated in them had been amply illustrated by the events of the time. The attempts at reaction denounced by the poet had culminated in the execution of the wrong-headed Charles I.; and though the extremes pursued by the fanatic Commonwealth's-men during the *interregnum* had brought on a restoration, and apparently secured the triumph of reaction, it was but a temporary advantage—indeed a fatal illusion and a snare. No!

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* Taking separate quarto plays, and supposing each edition to have numbered 300 copies, it has been calculated that 18,000 copies of Shakspere's dramas were supplied to the public during his life.

the law had gone forth, and "the matter was by the decree of the Watchers."

It remains but to point the moral of the tale.

Out of the bosom of the Infinite, a soul having transferred its allegiance from the Eternal to the Temporal, manifested itself in a mortal body on the 23d April 1564. That immortal soul brought with it powers and attributes from the Eternal and the Infinite; but their operation was limited by the condition of the organism with which it had associated. The soul, moreover, was not only immortal but cosmical; and therefore enjoyed not only a will, in which the personality of man resides, but a strong will, by which the genius of the individual is displayed. Doubtless this Shaksperian soul was chafed like others, when, in an infant body, it found that it was incapable of sustaining and fully expressing the action of a will, yet free, but in bonds. It was fain to expend itself in inarticulate cries, until it had learned to exercise the organs of speech, and acquired the use of language. Gradually the infant frame enlarged and strengthened, was active and useful: and the soul that actuated it increased in the experience and enjoyment of a life that at first to it was foreign and strange. It wandered in pleasant places, and recognised associations which endeared them to memory. There was the village, and the village-church, and the clear Avon, with the stately swan sailing adown the stream. There, too, were the old men and women of the town, and lads and lasses, sisters, brothers, husbands, wives, friends, and

acquaintance; and at length came strangers, too, who were players, and first revealed the mysteries of the drama to the boy Shakspere. I know what an important event this first visit to a theatre is to an intelligent child. A new world is at once opened; and from that moment creation is observed with a consciousness and a discrimination not previously exercised by the novitiate mind. From that time forth Shakspere brooded on the story and characters of the play that he had witnessed, and began to imitate the language of poetry, and the actors who had mouthed it. He looked also on the life about him for themes suited to such high discourse; and at school and at home heard men criticise the performances, and sometimes read the books that contained the plays or the stories they represented. To gain knowledge foreign to itself, the soul had entered the labyrinth of time,—"a mighty maze, but not without a plan;" and with a "divine instinct" for such knowledge, it now prosecuted its investigations where and how it could. The Infinite still worked within it, and a sublime dissatisfaction possessed it, while yet there was any thing to learn. The soul, which had contracted itself to a point, now extended its sphere and lived in a wider circle of information and endeavour.

The youth was precocious; he began early to write poetry; right early too he loved, and was a husband and father of three children before he was one-and-twenty. Accepting willingly these serious responsibilities, he calculated at once his resources,

and conceived the idea, which he soon realised, of gaining a living, as one of his detractors calls it, "by the occupation of a poet." London was the only place in which this could be done, and the actor's the only profession in which it could be most easily accomplished; to London therefore the young man went, and attached himself to the playhouse, insinuating his plays for performance as he best might, until he begot a faith in his employers, and obtained unquestioned possession of the stage. So prudent and cautious was he in these proceedings, that his circumstances appear to have improved from year to year; and no record exists of his having ever been embarrassed. Onward and upward he progressed, until he had written thirty-five dramas, all of the most rare excellence; then, submitting to an accident, he ceased to produce, and retired from public life to a retreat which he had purchased in his native town, and there reposed from his labours in competence and ease.

In tracing his progress as a dramatic writer, we cannot help discerning that he commenced as a poet. He had indeed written poems before he had written dramas, and also wrote poems while occupied on his plays. But in the drama also he was a poet. The plays that he had witnessed at Stratford were poetical in spirit and treatment, representing human passion in sweet words, fit epithets, with metaphors, allegories, hyperboles, amphibologies, similitudes, and choice phrases; and those who witnessed plays, either there or in London, expected that they should be so richly

invested with the pomp of verse and garniture of language. At first his solicitude was to obtain the command over the metre and diction, and the knowledge of the various devices by which rhythmical composition might be rendered pleasing. Some curious instances have been pointed out of his ingenuity in this respect in the dramas composed in the first seven years of his career. Having proved his skill in the execution of these works, he was next intrusted with the revision of those grand stage-histories which served for the delight and instruction of the people, before newspapers were in vogue to discuss the political relations of society, and the duties and privileges of kings and people. He then undertook the task of thoroughly composing some of these great works himself, and so successfully laboured in their production that he transcended the efforts of all competitors in his own time, and has not been excelled by any successor. Having by these labours established his fame, he sought to divert his mind by exercises of a lighter kind, and produced several delightful comedies. Now, feeling his position to be firm, proud of his independence, and with the instinct of the true artist, he determined to investigate some of the higher problems of life, and produced a series of plays, some on fictitious and some on historical subjects, into which he poured all the wealth of his genius, and on which he exhausted all the resources of his spiritual nature. He soared a higher and yet higher flight, and, as he wandered among the stars, new constellations opened and widened before him.

One theme suggested another; one chamber of the soul was unsealed, and then another; until at length he told to man more of his mind and heart than any other poet or dramatist had ever revealed. Merits so lofty and ample were of course not fully appreciated while he lived. Gradually, however, they obtained the recognition of the highest minds, who, like Sir Walter Scott, esteemed of the volume that held these divine dramas, as worthy to lie side by side on the same table or to stand on the same library-shelf with that which contained the Holy Scriptures themselves.

It was fortunate for Shakspere that, young as he was, he had exchanged passion for duty, when he began the work of his profession. Hence his mind was in a serene and cheerful state, and his first drama showed nothing of that perturbation which marks his two narrative poems. Even in them, however, the Spirit of Poetry dominated and harmonised the passion, drew from it all that was earthly and detrimental, and left it so purified or etherealised, that we have the distinct sentiment and primitive inspiration set free from the sensuous appetite of love. Yet there is the ardent flame, the imperishable impulse, the creative and irresistible instinct; nor is any restraint attempted on these from a false shame, the presence of which would have rendered immoral what in itself is as pure as paradisal nature. The universal feeling is recognised in its fullness, but also in its delicacy, its sacredness, and its beauty. The treatment of the subject is at once romantic and

classical—warmer than the one, more formal than the other. The figures are not of stone, but flesh and blood, soft, sensitive, quick with the life of life; yet are they not mortal, frail, or corruptible. The ancient spirit is there, but re-incarnate in a modern form! Albeit on Greek and Roman subjects, and classical in the idea; yet both the *Venus and Adonis* and the *Lucrece* are modern poems, and in the form of their treatment indisputably romantic. No Greek or Roman poet would have thrown on the subject so voluptuous a colouring, or given to them the suavity, the variety, and the expansion which belongs to the pictorial as distinguished from the statuesque. In both poems, however, the appeal lies to the imagination, and the works are only to be contemplated in that light which never yet was seen on sea, or earth, or sky;—a spiritual light, which purifies while it illumines, and permits no grossness to inhere in any object on which it shines. They are beheld, not with the eye of sense, but with that of reason; which sees the idea, or translates the image into it.

The first of the poems mentioned is, it is true, not exclusively imaginative—not exclusively ideal; but there is much in it that is merely imagerial, and chiefly pertinent to fancy. It digresses into a multitude of illustrations, while love disports with animal as well as human and divine natures. Hence a certain disquiet to the mind, both of writer, as I think, and of reader. Shakspere, it is probable, was then, not only a poet but a lover; and some of his sonnets are supposed to have reference to Anne Hathaway.

It may be, notwithstanding the lofty mystical meaning attributed to them as a whole. Occasional pieces might easily be made to find an appropriate place in the series, and thus experience be brought in aid of the argument. Many are burthened with the pains of absence—the heaviest that lovers have to endure; and the feeling described with its touching incidents were probably substantiated in the record of his remembrances. Here is one:

"How like a winter hath my absence been
From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year!
What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen!
What old December's bareness everywhere!
And yet this time removed was summer's time;
The teeming autumn, big with rich increase,
Bearing the wanton burden of the prime,
Like widowed wombs after their lords' decease:
Yet this abundant issue seemed to me
But hope of orphans and unfathered fruit;
For summer and his pleasures wait on thee,
And, thou away, the very birds are mute;
Or, if they sing, 'tis with so dull a cheer,
That leaves look pale, dreading the winter's near."

Pages might be filled with illustration showing that the poet must have experienced and felt keenly the anguish of absence, whether as lover or friend. Wherefore he could well describe the sorrows he had borne, to whatever poetic use, as poets are wont to do, he might ultimately subordinate them. Anne Hathaway was doubtless, as Gilfillan avers, "a suitable match to him in degree, in substance, and in external appearance;" and all statements of the supposed infelicity of their marriage he rightly treats as "specimens of the silly and gossiping manner in which some parts of Shakspere's life have been

treated by persons who were, no doubt, disappointed because they found no mention of the name of 'Shakspere' in the records of Doctors' Commons, and could never forgive him because he died in his wife's arms." At this time probably Shakspere's own appearance was similar to that of the youth in his *Lover's Complaint:*

"One by nature's outwards so commended,
That maidens' eyes stuck over all his face.
Love lacked a dwelling, and made him *her* place;
And when in his fair parts *she* did abide,
She was new lodged, and newly deified.*
His browny locks did hang in crooked curls,
And every light occasion of the wind
Upon his lips their silken parcels hurls.
What's sweet to do, to do will aptly find:
Each eye that saw him did enchant the mind;
For on his visage was in little drawn
What largeness thinks in Paradise was sawn.
Small show of man was yet upon his chin;
His phœnix down began but to appear,
Like unshorn velvet, on that termless skin,
Whose bare outbragged the web it seemed to wear;
Yet showed his visage by that cost more dear;
And nice affections wavering stood in doubt
If best 'twere as it was, or best without.
His qualities were beauteous as his form,
For *maiden-tongued he was, and thereof free;*†
Yet, if men moved him, was he such a storm
As oft 'twixt May and April is to see,
When winds breathe sweet, unruly though they be."

The hero of the ballad, however, is one who "liveried falseness in a pride of truth;" in regard to which we

* Here again, as in the Sonnets, Love is made female, and Beauty male.

† This agrees with what Ben Jonson states of him, viz. "He was indeed honest, and of an open and free nature; had an excellent phantasy, brave notions, and *gentle expressions*, wherein he *flowed with that facility that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped.*"

take leave to distinguish between him and the *gentle* poet, who sang the sorrows of the deserted fair one. In some accomplishments, however, there was strong resemblance:

"All aids, themselves made fairer by their place,
Came for additions; yet their purposed trim
Pierced not his grace, but were all graced by him.
So on the tip of his subduing tongue
All kinds of argument and question deep,
All replication prompt, and reason strong,
For his advantage still did wake and sleep:
To make the weeper laugh, the laugher weep,
He had the dialect and different skill,
Catching all passions in his craft of will;
That he did in the general bosom reign
Of young, of old; and sexes both enchanted,
To dwell with him in thoughts, or to remain
In personal duty, following where he haunted:
Consents bewitched, ere he desire, have granted:
And dialogued for him what he would say,
Asked their own wills, and made their wills obey."

Is this a self-conscious portrait? Do the following lines refer to actual facts rather than to symbolical fancies?

"Many there were that did his picture get,
To serve their eyes, and in it put their mind;
Like fools that in the imagination set
The goodly objects which abroad they find
Of lands and mansions, theirs in thought assigned;
And labouring in mo pleasures to bestow them,
Than the true gouty landlord which doth owe them;
So many have, that never touched his hand,
Sweetly supposed them mistress of his heart."

One of the most intelligent and critical writers on Shakspere notices the fact that, among the scandals propagated of him, one calumny is wanting. "With such a foundation," says Mr. Neil, "to build upon as the Sonnets appear now-a-days to afford, it is singular

that tales of a wild and irregular life led by Shakspere in London were not multiplied and registered in memorials and in traditions. If the *fancies* of some commentators were at all credible, of some sinful time when remorse and remorse-breeding deeds were familiar to Shakspere, it is singular that the name of no one woman is popularly identified with that of Shakspere, and that the creator of Desdemona, and Juliet, and Ophelia, and Imogen, and Viola, and Constance, and Cornelia, and Rosalind, and Portia, was not the poet of one woman, but the poet of womankind." The same remark is made in Jameson's *Romance of Biography;* and it is deserving of the most serious attention. As Mr. Neil urges, there is no reason to doubt that Shakspere's career in London was known in Stratford; that his marriage and his after-life, in his native town, were patent to all; that his wife lived with him; and that she most probably urged on the erection of his monument, and was buried, by her own desire, beside him, after the "churl, Death," had covered his remains with dust; yet "no breath of scandal has spread its corrosive influence over his wedded life from any trustworthy source, or appears in any record of his own time. A worthless anecdote or so has been fathered upon his reputation; but no weight can be attached to matters such as these, or, if it were so, no fame would be free from stain and sully. The utmost indefiniteness surrounds the accusations brought against his moral character, and they are based upon mere inferences, drawn from writings that are perhaps as dramatic as

those with which he held the listeners in delighted bondage in the theatres. After his retirement from the scene of his struggles, triumph, and fame, he seems to have dwelt among the companions of his younger years, as the respected father of a family, in calm, unostentatious privacy."

Yes; while of love Shakspere could, as he does in this poem and *The Passionate Pilgrim*, sing in the most ardent strains, yet in practice he seems to have preferred marital fidelity before all the excitements of passion. Self-absorbed, still thinking, ever creating, he had no leisure and no inclination for vicious indulgences. Yet he knew:

> "O most potential love! vow, bond, nor space,
> In thee hath neither sting, knot, nor confine,
> For thou art all, and all things else are thine.
> When thou impressest, what are precepts worth
> Of stale example? When thou wilt inflame,
> How coldly those impediments stand forth
> Of wealth, of filial fear, law, kindred, fame!
> Love's arms are peace, 'gainst rule, 'gainst sense, 'gainst shame,
> And sweetens, in the suffering pangs it bears,
> The aloes of all forces, shocks, and fears."

And this truth he made the theme of his maiden play, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, consciously attempting to prove what writers say:

> "As in the sweetest bud
> The eating canker dwells, so eating love
> Inhabits in the finest wits of all."

The theme and the treatment, indeed, relish more of the nascent poet than of the incipient dramatist. Love—an infinite and eternal force—compels all that it subjects, regardless of faith, virtue, honour, to one exclusive and peremptory end, whereto mistress and

friend alike are sacrificed, until it yields to the law of limitation; for such love is the perpetual caprice of desire, without fidelity, until, by the marriage of two minds, it is fixed on its proper object, wherein no change is afterwards permitted; for

> "Better have none
> Than *plural* faith, which is too much by one."

No fear, then, that Valentine and Proteus will any more betray each other. The bridal of the one shall be that of both:

> "One feast, one house, one mutual happiness."

The same moral Shakspere points in Romeo, who with ease transfers his love from Rosaline to Juliet; but when "holy church hath incorporate the two in one," change is impossible. The case is otherwise with the unmarried Hamlet. The cause imposed upon him, besides its own yoke, galls him with another. She whom he loves more than could "forty thousand brothers," must, with

> "Trivial fond records,
> All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
> That youth and observation copied there,"

be "wiped away" from "the table of his memory," and love must be forgotten for revenge. Judiciously the poet has not brought the feeling into prominence; but it exists as an under-current, and is one among the motives that produce those anomalies in Hamlet's conduct which perplex equally the profound and shallow reader. It bubbles up in the mysterious scene wherein he commends Ophelia to a nunnery; and, at her grave, spouts up with a violence which threatens

reason. It is always thus with suppressed feelings. When the moment of their revelation comes, the long-hoarded sentiment exhausts at once its accumulated force, and with abrupt explosion well nigh shatters the vessel in which it had been confined.

With Bertram the case is somewhat altered. Reticent and undemonstrative, unknown even to himself, because yet unacquainted with love, Bertram, in all the forepart of the play, is rather individuated by his position than individualised by his will. He is acted on by others; but has no spontaneity to act of himself. He will neither love nor strive to do it. He is shy as Adonis, and rude as Cymon. He rushes to the war to avoid a wife. But what is man when woman has determined that he shall love? The very air he breathes is magical, and every haunt he visits an enchanted castle, forest, garden, or chamber, wherein he needs must become spell-bound. He has no choice but hers; the influence of her will is on him like a charm, and if by one inlet she is debarred from his heart, she will enter it by another. Bertram falls by aid of one of those "screens" which, in his *Vita Nuova*, Dante employs in his love-passages with Beatrice; and, betrayed by the medium, sacrifices to Hymen what he had designed for Venus, though by the cunning poet named Diana. The fore-doomed victim now has passed the Rubicon; and we shall yet see him a free agent, a personal volition, who before was but an impersonal unit in an uncertain multitude; in a word, a man because a husband, and a *willing* one:

> "*All's well that ends well:* still the fine's the crown;
> Whate'er the course, the end is the renown."

To what we have called the law of limitation the wise poet submitted in his own person. Faithful to the *one* woman, he could devote himself to his life's work without disturbance, live in honour, and die in peace. We have said that he was a self-absorbed man; and one seemingly unamiable trait in his character may be thus accounted for, namely, he appears to have lived among his fellow-poets as if not of them. Not only is his name not found in Henslowe's Diary, but it is not found among the "Commendatory Verses" by which they were wont to introduce and authorise each other's works. Ben Jonson's verses precede Shakspere's plays; but where are Shakspere's verses to precede Ben Jonson's, which were published the year of Shakspere's death? He stood alone; yet we hear no murmur on this account. He was not only self-justified in assuming this solitary grandeur, but they who were most entitled to complain justified him, too, by their acquiescence. In like manner his plays remained undedicated either to peer or prince. He wanted no patronage; nevertheless, it is supposed that he received encouragement both from Queen Elizabeth and King James, though he never condescended to dedicate a drama to either. There is a tradition that the maiden Queen complained of this neglect, and that the poet indited some sonnets as his apology (82-85), which certainly contain an ingenious excuse for his omission of the ordinary practice. An illustration, too, of his self-absorbed habit occurs in a

tradition that while playing in *Henry IV.* he had become so engrossed in his part as not to heed her Majesty; whereupon she returned and dropped her glove, —as a token of her especial favour,—which the player-poet stooped to pick up, continuing in character to say:

> "And though now bent on this high embassage,
> Yet stoop we to take up our *cousin's* glove."

After which he withdrew, and delivered it. Such a queen appears indeed rather as a faery queen of Spenser's imagination, than as the stern monarch of an isle where busy men compete for gain, not for compliment. And, in truth, Shakspere himself was evidently one of these busy men, with too much occupation to permit him to indulge in some social complaisances, which, though expected from others, were pretermitted to him.

With a large and loving heart, devoted to one object, but attracting many friends, Shakspere, for the first seven years of his poetic life, like "the stock-dove brooding over his own sweet voice," concerned himself almost exclusively with its mysteries—those elementary impulses of the living soul which urge youth onward to enterprise and association. He now began to live in the outward as well as the inward, and evoked both Memory and Fancy in the study of his country's chronicles, in order to furnish forth those dramas which were to identify him with his native land, and lay the bases of an imperishable fame. This was severe work; but it expanded the mind beyond his own subjective individuity, and en-

abled him ultimately to grasp the infinite beyond. At once he recognised his own personality and the foreign intelligence which spoke to him in the picture-language of the physical universe. Self-absorbed as he might be, he was no longer alone; but myriads of spiritual beings were his companions, and inspirers of his waking dreams. At first he leaned on example, treading in the steps of one who, though anonymous, had left traces of his feet in the same walk of an art then almost new, and yet in its mechanical stage of development; cautiously modifying or enlarging, until the act of manipulating subjects so complex and extensive had become sufficiently familiar to allow him deliberately to aim at the structure of a dramatic organism, the perfection of which should secure the admiration of the wise of his own and succeeding times. Such work, I repeat, was severe work; and therefore during these years the poet sought relief in occasional lighter efforts. He purposely unbent the Ulyssean bow, which he had undertaken to bend, and had bent, that it might recover its spring and preserve its strength. Even in these efforts, however, he dealt with external life. No longer the love of such gentle natures as Valentine, or Proteus, or Hamlet, or Romeo, or Helena, or Juliet; but the rough actualities of a Petruchio and of Kate the curst, and the revenges of a malignant Jew. Yet even then he could not paint the picture all in shadow, but threw on it the light of Portia's intelligence. And towards the conclusion of the period he revelled altogether in phantasy, dreaming of Theseus' wed-

ding with Hippolyta, Oberon's quarrel with Titania, their reconciliation, and that "merry and tragical, tedious and brief" drama played by the mechanics of Athens. Such was the wise self-discipline with which Shakspere aided his mental development; and with which we may perceive, if we will, that his moral kept an even pace.

To individuate and to individualise, and both in perfection, Shakspere had learned in the composition of historic drama. Therein some men are what they are by reason of their position alone, others by the force of an operative will. Of the former, what an instance in Richard II.; of the latter, what an example in Richard III.! The crimes of the one, and the sufferings of the other, are those of the land they represent. It is England that hath to cast aside the bands of old convention, and is in painful travail that she may become a nation. And not without blood-shedding may she gain remission. This is the mystery in the destiny of all nations; and this the mystery which is now being acted in America, that she may win an individual character among the peoples of the earth, and manifest an undivided personal will, to the destruction of that "peculiar domestic institution" which hitherto has served for the wall of partition between the North and South. They will, in the end, like one another all the better for having fought together, and proved their mutual manhood in the stern courtesy of the war-embrace; the struggle, though fratricidal, will create mutual respect; and whether or not in form, in spirit they will be

united, and in their union find strength to maintain their own against the world.

And like to this material conflict, through which a multitude becomes an individual unity; so, with and in each man, there is a spiritual conflict, by reason of which he becomes an individual character. The strong will triumphs, and the person is manifested. Particularly is this the case with the Man of Genius. Imagine, then, the process by which Shakspere became what he was, and as he found himself to be at the end of the first thirteen years of professional labour. Throughout, be it understood, he was the type-man, and teeming with a prodigious birth, that had its avatar in himself. And now he was a Name, which a Meres might register, and a Burbie utilise. The anarchy of chaos had been encountered and surmounted; and a kosmos, denominated Shakspere, had assumed its place in the universe of spirits.

That kosmos, however, had yet to be peopled. What had been done in those eighteen plays, composed previous to that eventful year 1598, formed, as it were, but the platform or stage on which future character-plays were to be enacted. Out of his own individuality, what individuals were in turn generated! Falstaff himself, compared with the characters that were to adorn the future, was rather an individuate owing his distinction to his corpulency, than an individual will moulding the body to an especial purpose. It was the carnal man preventing the spiritual development, rather than the latter lighting up

the tabernacle of the flesh, and revealing itself in its own especial temple. But now, not only was the individual to be created by the poet, but the peculiarities of the individual, such as they come out necessarily in the comic relations of life. These peculiarities are sometimes casual enough; but they are what they are by an action of the will, and not by any necessity of the flesh.

Let the sincere reader fix his attention on this point; much gathers round it, for which, I trust, he has been prepared by the previous exercitations.

The human soul is a force projected from the Infinite into a finite sphere of action. On its manifestation in time it is connected with a minute point in space, which, under the operation of its influence, correlated to that of the cosmic powers with which it associates, gradually enlarges with the life imparted to it, and becomes a living organism animated throughout with an intelligent spirit, by which it is signalised and distinguished from all other being.

The thorough impersonation of this individuality would express a perfect man fully developed in all the human faculties. The best men, however, seldom arrive at such maturity as to express the full stature which is the standard of humanity; and so they manifest what is generally esteemed some defect of culture or original nature. The term 'defect' here, however, is improperly applied, and simply signifies a limitation in the degree of *growth*. The degree realised, however low in the scale, is, in fact, a stage of development, an attainment achieved. It may,

perhaps, only respect certain inferior faculties or functions; nevertheless, it is a fact accomplished, even when, as an apparent shortcoming, it may provoke reasonable ridicule. Mirth is excited when we regard it as an abortive effort to reach an ideal which is hopelessly distant. Comic characters in the drama present us instances in illustration. They resemble children, but yet attempting to walk, who, in every successive effort they make to stand upright, stumble and fall. But observe them—still they persevere, support themselves by the leg of a chair or table, and so contrive to toddle onward to their destination; while their mothers, who hold forth their arms to receive the precious adventurers, and reward the infant spirit of enterprise with a loving kiss, laugh loud with all their might equally at its failures and successes. Herein we may recognise the presence of a power in its first beginnings. Already is the child stronger to-day than it was yesterday; and to-morrow it will be stronger still! On the fourth day it will walk.

Few, however, confessedly arrive at full strength and complete development. But in vital dynamics the instance is not solitary. In the embryo being, if the development be interrupted and arrested at some early stage of its regular evolution, a form results which is analogous to that of an inferior class, both in structure and shape. In like manner, all lower animal forms in relation to the highest may be regarded, not only as declensions from the true human idea, but as abortions, by anticipation of nature's mature work, the human frame. In man the organic structure is

complete; his organisation is no less than the apotheosis of that of the animal; while in the sphere of intellect, perfect individuality is only consummated in genius, and in that of will has its acme in integrity, or moral worth. Such individuality, considered as Personality, is a power of self-affirmation, —a power of which Conscience, as Self-knowledge, is representative.

In presenting the scheme of the ascent of animal life, a scientific Friend would indicate the law regulating the series of developments of organic beings— a law discoverable in all the manifold varieties, diversities, and richness of the productions of nature; in all preserving a unity in diversity, a plan and method in the seeming irregularities and even sports of this productive fertility. The resulting forms of animal life, he adds, "present not a plan which we can consider as the effect of any arbitrary combination, or of a regularity imposed upon nature by the human fancy or understanding; it is neither a scale, nor a ladder, nor a network; it is neither like the combination of a kaleidoscope, nor the pattern of a patchwork; it is no process by increase or superaddition; but it is, as in all nature's acts, a *growth*, and the symmetry, proportion, and plan arise out of an internal organising principle.* This gradation and evolution of animated nature is not simple and uniform; nature is ever rich, fertile, and varied in act and product: and we might

* How well these words describe the Shaksperian method of producing dramas from the evolution or development of ideas, in and through conceptions and intuitions!

perhaps venture to symbolise the system of the animal creation as some monarch of the forest, whose roots, firmly planted in a vivifying soil, spread beyond our ken; whose trunk, proudly erected, points its summit to a region of purer light, and whose widespread branches, twigs, sprays, and leaflets, infinitely diversified, manifest the energy of the life within. In the great march of nature nothing is left behind; and every former step contains the promise and prophecy of that which is to follow, even as the oak exists potentially in the acorn; and if nature seem at any part to recede, it is only as it were to gather strength for a higher and more determined ascent."

The physiologist has described the steps of the series, and the transcendental anatomist has demonstrated the laws. In all cases, resistance has to be converted into willing subjection and coöperation, and the process is necessarily gradual. The divine law that compels and coerces the brute and unintelligent powers of nature, condescends to induce and guide when it would infuse light and life, as in the bee and elephant. On rational man it acts by obligation and conviction. Each transient form is superseded by another of greater perfection, until it has attained its specific rank in the scale of individuality. The more numerous and various the parts, the more perfect the individual; yet as every organic whole is the result of an antecedent principle, this, as an indivisible unity, will in the more perfect animal represent itself in some visible and central product. Comparative perfection will also be indicated by the

relative emancipation and independence of the animal individuity from alien external powers, and which, as superior, it may command, regulate, and adapt at convenience. Lastly, in self-knowledge, mind is added in the creature to life. Man is endowed with a structure, the perfection of which is revealed in a balanced relation of the parts to a whole, of the living powers and faculties, best fitted for a being exercising intelligent choice and destined for moral freedom, in the exercise of a rational will. Any departure from the perfect proportion is an exaggeration or subtraction, which may disgust as a deformity, or amuse as an exception.*

To the transient forms of individuity in human character comedy renders homage, and frequently fixes the moral types, so as to define distinct species in different states of dramatic or social genesis. Art, as well as society in its members, recognises these in her votaries, and acknowledges genius in erratic individualities, however low in the scale of manifestation, however distant by means of declension from the ideal apex. In these, certain apparent imperfections may arise, perhaps from the absence of training, or even from natural occasions; yet the realised aptitude, far off as it may be from the full development attainable in the more favoured examples of the ascending series, is not the less the signature and efflorescence, as it were of an internal energy which has produced a spe-

* See the Hunterian Oration by the late Mr. Joseph Henry Green, as delivered, in 1840, before the Royal College of Surgeons in London.

cific effect:—I repeat, an *effect*, not a *defect*. Thus, in vulgar life, those so-called abortive specimens of talent which, stopping at a certain point, make up the humorous peculiarities that the caricaturist or comic poet places on the page or on the boards, are still in their degree, however eccentric in form or aim, the result and evidence of a genial nature working at the root with sufficient strength to realise many curious results. And these are sometimes even admired when witnessed on the public stage of a theatre as the special mannerism of the favourite low comedian, and prove the source of many a handsome fortune in the histrionic profession. A Buckstone, a Keeley, a Wright, a Robson, or a Toole, may be named as an instance of what is meant; and many a part in Shakspere's drama—such as Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Dogberry, Verges, William, Audrey, and Bottom, with his associates—may be added by way of illustration. Characters thus stunted, and irregularly exhibited, are developments to a certain extent, which, though proceeding from the universal, have not attained to it, but only to a limited circle where the peculiarity, once fixed and encouraged, grows with the growth, and strengthens with the strength of the artist. In cases of this kind we recognise the degree attained by the player, as the genius of the individual—as a point of comparative excellence reached, not as a defect exemplified, and we reward it accordingly. Our philosophy is affirmative in its details and in its total. Step by step up the scale of merit genius labours, showing at each an

advance and an ascent corresponding to the native power and life by which it is borne upward to its appointed goal. Shakspere, moreover, in producing such characters as such artists have a special aptitude for impersonating, not only commends them to our laughter but to our sympathy. He values each at his true worth, and loves the meanest of them; not one of them will he permit us to treat with contempt.

The genius of such artists, or that of the characters they represent, generally partake more of the animal than the human in our common nature. In this they show such affinities with the animal races themselves, that one might almost be tempted to believe that Shakspere intended to symbolise it by giving to Bottom an Ass's head. The difference, indeed, between the animal type in man and that in the inferior creatures, consists in the latter having some attribute in excess, and others lacking in due prominence—there an exaggeration, and here a want. Dilate the head, say physiologists, and you have a symptom of disease; protrude the jaws, you have a voracious animal; lengthen the ears, timidity is expressed; let the nose project, and the animal is governed by its scent; enlarge the belly, and you are reminded of the animal appetites; long arms may fit him for an inhabitant of the trees, and a suitable companion for the ape; and predominating length of legs are infallibly associated with the habits of the wading or leaping animals. These peculiar developments are related to destined ends, and inconsistent with a free will in the animal. Thus the timid her-

bivorous animals have a quickness of ear not needed by man, who was not meant to catch the sound of distant danger and be governed by his fears; the eagle, in a like manner, has a more piercing sight, the beast of prey a keener scent; but then man was not purposed to be the fellow of the tiger, or a denizen of the forest. The highest type of man is not distinguished by the preponderance of a part that necessitates a particular use, or the absence of a part that deprives the creature of a power: though these be the characteristics of some comic artistes, whose success depends on a peculiarity that marks their inferiority in the scale, and of some characters in society who are accepted as jolly good fellows, with whom we love to laugh. In their peculiar way, however inferior in others, such men excel their betters; just in the same manner that dogs, horses, deer, excel man in swiftness, though they cannot climb or walk erect. The otter, the beaver, and the seal, swim well, but it is their only boast above creatures of their own kind; whales or other cetaceous animals, though admirably adapted for swimming, have no other mode of locomotion. Man stands and walks erect, runs, jumps, climbs, swims; man alone can so modify his frame, that it is in his power to waive the high privilege of the harmony and balance of his faculties; and by concentering his volition to any one property or perfection, we have reason to believe that he might equal or excel the beast most characterised by that perfection,—outrun the deer, outwrestle the bear, climb with the monkey. Man, with the most modi-

fiable organs of motion, is most capable of subjugating them to his will, and of rendering them the instruments of his varied purposes. And it is not apart from his volition, that his lower functions, faculties, or desires, attain a peculiar dominance, so as to shape specifically either the genius of the low comedian or the character of the comic individual.

It may serve to show the habitual caution of Shakspere in his creative processes, that he tried his hand first on these comic peculiarities, before he ventured on those sublimer creations which occupied him in the maturity of his intelligence. It is true that occasionally he rose somewhat above the predicated level in Jaques, Malvolio, Orsino, Viola, and other ideal characters;—but what are these to the Othellos, Lears, Macbeths, Mark Antonies, Leonatis, Timons, and Wolseys? men in whom will in its freedom is fully developed, if not the conscience shown in its moral grandeur as the keystone of the arch and sovereign ruler of the fabric. He ascended the ladder by steps, not reached the top at a leap. Even in relation to dramatic structure, he made essay first of the more simple, and left the more complex for after trial. The foresight and mental discipline that are implied in all this form a marvellous instance of poetic self-consciousness and sense of power and progress. That progress was throughout genetic, like that of nature, a *growth*, one degree blending with and dissolving into the other, each work the promise and prophecy of its successor, and suggesting it in some mysterious and recondite manner. The

new cycle carries on the feeling with which the former closed. Hopeless love, which makes Malvolio ridiculous, is in Othello transformed into love which might have been hopeless from the difficulties in its way at the beginning, and which, through jealousy, brought about by the artifices of a fiend, is rendered fatally so in the end. Iago is to Othello as Satan to Adam, and as envious of his excellence as the demon of the man. Othello is as much of a lover as Romeo, but his is the love of a man, not a boy. His character has become fixed; his worth has been tried in the furnace, and proved to be true metal. He has reached nearly the highest elevation as a man, individually and socially; the more tremendous accordingly is his fall. Comparing the tragedy of *Othello* with that of *Romeo*, we find that Shakspere has greatly advanced in his art. The accumulated murders that crowd the catastrophes of *Romeo* and *Hamlet* no longer deform the last scene in *Othello*. A considerable interval takes place between the death of Desdemona and that of Othello; and meanwhile the curtains of her bed are directed to be closed, so that he falls alone, and the drop descends on one corse only. And we shall do well to remark that he further improves in this particular in his subsequent dramas.

What a range of passion in *Othello!* love, jealousy, revenge, remorse; and the first of these illustrated in all forms of conception, down to that mere sensualism for which "the brach of Venice" sacrifices his ignoble life. The highest conceptions are those of the magnanimous Moor and Desdemona; but that of the lat-

ter is the simplest and sublimest. Her character is formed exclusively and purely of love for its chosen object; in other respects she is faulty, and meant to be so by her inspired poet. The truth of love is to her more than the truth of language, and for the sake of that she would deceive the world, her father, and even Othello himself. Her vehement desires overleap the barrier and impediment of words, and stop not to select correct phrases, when her affections can gain their object more readily. True to the feeling, not to the expression, what she says must be interpreted by what she does, in that "downright violence and storm of fortune" which becomes the normal element and condition of her married life. Something of this Shakspere had already shown in Juliet, who, so soon as it became needful, prevaricated with her parents, and was justified in her conduct by the devout religious friar. Love verily abounds in pious frauds. In both instances, however, the love which in its infinite power breaks down all finite considerations, sacrifices also its votary, shattering with other limited things the frail vessel for which its inspiration is too strong.

If we should appear to ramble in these remarks, or to repeat previous ones, let it be known that we do not merely recapitulate, but "gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing be lost."

The tragedy of *Othello*, in its completeness and careful finish, bears evidence of the easy circumstances and happy life that now enabled the poet to secure a serene thoughtfulness even when most possessed.

An artistic regularity and smoothness prevail, and no sign of hurry impairs the value of the work. By an orderly disposition, the poet climbs to the climax of passionate emotion, and sustains himself with facility at the highest elevation. The last scene is, in its structure, a marvel; and when adequately performed, in effect perfectly overwhelming.

The same skill and leisurely contrivance are to be remarked in *Measure for Measure*. The treatment of such a subject must have been a great relief to Shakspere's mind, after the passion of *Othello*. Love, in the new venture, is put upon his trial, and question raised whether legal limits should not be imposed on his vagaries, not only in single but in married life. Angelo has not only placed Claudio under restraint, but he has repudiated Mariana, and punished a virtuous woman for having loved himself. He is a hypocrite in power, and the State governed by him is in a fair way of being denaturalised, and reduced to the condition of monachism. All real virtue would be sacrificed to appearances. It was with a fine instinct, that the poet made the Titan form of Barnardine, the homicidal gaol-bird, rise in the midst of this novel system, as if for its violent and immediate destruction, and by way of striking antithesis to the pretended morality on which it was sought to be established. The death-doomed criminal defies punishment—death to him is a mere "drunken sleep;"—he has but to say this, and the staff drops from the hand of authority. He is not executed. Shakspere has in this given us his opinion on capital punishments. England, it is true, has not

yet learned the lesson. But there is no end to his teachings; and this is only one of his lessons which she has neglected to learn. But she will learn them all in time; for the poet is a prophet, and these dramas are divine prophecies.

And such is the reason wherefore, in so many instances, they contain questionable points, which transcend ordinary criticism. Even a Schlegel has not philosophy enough to reach their altitude; and the sublime morality of Shakspere appears to him a base compromise. The same sun shining on a bed of flowers or a dung-heap produces very opposite odours. Shakspere's extensive sympathy for human nature, even in its evil examples, offends the strait-laced, who perceive not the soul of goodness even in very respectable people, or only in them. He, as Hazlitt has remarked, is no pedantic moralist; in one sense, indeed, no moralist at all; in another, of all the greatest. "He," says that genial critic, "was a moralist in the same sense in which nature is one. He taught what he had learnt from her. He showed the greatest knowledge of humanity with the greatest fellow-feeling for it."

In organic structures their comparative excellence consists in the greater number, variety, and complexity of the parts that compose the marvellous unity; the interdependence of each on the other, the subordination of the lower to the higher, and the intimate union of all to the constitution of one, being meanwhile perfected in an equal proportion. In man, what our physiologist calls "the partless and indi-

visible unity" is "itself represented by a visible and central product, to which all the various parts converge, as the bond, medium, and condition of the union and communion, and of the interdependence of all in their constitution to *one*," namely, the Brain, which represents, in respect of power, that unity which the total shape or exterior exhibits in respect of sight or sense.

In the more complex tragedies of Shakspere, these laws of growth at the pitch of human perfection are observed, both in the numerosity of the plots, motives, incidents, episodes, and persons, and in the central character by which the unity or idea of the whole composition is prerogatively and cardinally expressed. Hence their astonishing conformity to the epic in the plan and purpose and variety of the parts, the great diversity and conflicting nature of their elements, and the simplicity and harmony of the whole. Such dramas as these have been written by no other author. What they are, *he* was. So varied in his mental properties, so ruled and guided by genetic principle, so strong of will, so well-centred in conscience, so perfect in reason, so full in understanding, so complete in sensuous perception; all working together to produce, both in the life speculative and in the life natural, the most perfect example of the human individual hitherto permitted in the history of man. Shakspere stands before us the representative of his race in the loftiest state of development, and with the consummate use

of those spiritual faculties which best establish the divinity of his origin.

Considered in reference to these criteria, the tragedy of *Lear* is a greater work than any that he had previously produced. Its epical proportions are gigantic, in growth exceeding all precedent for loftiness, breadth, and intensity. The thorough earnestness of the poet is terrible; the force of the passion stupendously oppressive; the extent of the imagination awfully perplexing, and the theme irresistibly enthralling the whole of our nature; heart and soul and sense being alike imprisoned in the magic web of a divine genius,—the which he had spun in heaven out of his own fine substance, by the instruction of a benevolent destiny, who had learned the wondrous and creant art from the Father himself of gods and men. Oh, the agonies of the paternal heart! the unutterable groanings! and yet man is ungrateful, repaying love and bounty with disobedience and the black injustice of doubt or contempt! Lear, with all his failings, is a grand image of all this; and Cordelia, with her love divided between him and her husband, the type of the best worshipper. More and more the rest of his household decline from the idea of filial obligation, until in the wreck of family relations universal anarchy substitutes order in the government of the world.

And here we must identify Shakspere with his age. Out of just such a wreck had the time emerged. Needful it was that patriarchal convention should be restored; though not in the patriarchal, but an im-

proved form; so that the new order, with which the anarchy was teeming, might be secured for a continuance, and bring with it a more ample and better-understood blessing to a regenerated society. A long time of unreason, more fearful than the madness of Lear, more wild than the assumed insanity of Edgar, had been survived, and the rude excesses of the past eras had been depicted by the poet, who now gathered them in full strength and combined them with a strange and enormous facility, that he might pile up in one colossal tragedy, the origin and aim of which were alike transcendently ideal, the most heart-rending sorrows, short of absolute horror, which poetic drama could possibly admit. Here, if any where, the inspiration of Shakspere is apparent. None of the rules of art, as known to his day, could have enabled him to attain the result that he has here accomplished. There was required an automatic action of the whole man, whether to conceive or to execute this most terrible, this most pathetic of tragedies. He who has not been overmastered by its agonies has not mastered its sublimities. Yet they lie too deep for tears. I weep only at one point. It is where Lear, coming out of his madness, recognises Cordelia.

No natural image is too great to paint the moral grief of Lear. Hazlitt, to his credit, gives us these: "The mind of Lear, staggering between the weight of attachment and the hurried movements of passion, is like a tall ship driven about by the winds, buffeted by the furious waves, but that still rides above the

storm, having its anchor fixed in the bottom of the sea; or it is like the sharp rock circled by the eddying whirlpool that foams and beats against it; or like the solid promontory pushed from its basis by the force of an earthquake." But why cite such images? I know of none adequate to its representation. To me it is an Apocalypse, full of glorious but painful visions, each a key to open up some mystery of the heart, or unlock some hidden chamber of the soul. Charles Lamb, too, who thought the tragedy not actable, attempts to describe Lear's anguish by similes. "The explosions of his passions are terrible as a volcano; they are storms turning up and disclosing to the bottom that rich sea, his mind, with all its vast riches. It is his mind which is laid bare." Why then these figures? We need indeed a voiceless language, an eloquent silence, as media for such a revelation; words are idle. Coleridge, as we have seen, is not behindhand in material tropes such as these, mingled, however, with critical thought. "Of all Shakspere's plays, *Macbeth* is the most rapid, *Hamlet* the slowest, in movement. *Lear* combines length with rapidity—like the hurricane and the whirlpool, absorbing while it advances. It begins, as a stormy day in summer, with brightness, but that brightness is lurid, and anticipates the tempest."

While quoting from Coleridge, let us add what he says of the Fool in *Lear:*

"The Fool is no common buffoon to make the groundlings laugh—no forced condescension of Shakspere's genius to the taste of his audience. Accord-

ingly, the poet prepares for his introduction, which he never does with any of his common clowns and fools, by bringing him into living connection with the pathos of the play. He is as wonderful a creation as Caliban; his wild babblings and inspired idiocy articulate and gauge the horrors of the scene."

Another citation I must give, relative to the fourth scene of the third act of *Lear:*

"O, what a world's convention of agonies is here! All external nature in a storm, all moral nature convulsed, the real madness of Lear, the feigned madness of Edgar, the babbling of the Fool, the desperate fidelity of Kent — surely such a scene was never conceived before or since! Take it but as a picture for the eye only, it is more terrific than any which a Michel Angelo, inspired by a Dante, could have conceived, and which none but a Michel Angelo could have executed. Or let it have been uttered to the blind, the howlings of nature would seem to have been converted into the voice of conscious humanity."

A glance at the fifth act will show that in this drama Shakspere further carried out his improvements as to the disposition of the catastrophe. This of *Lear* is still better than that of *Othello.* Here the interest at the end is fixed on the group of two—Lear and Cordelia—whose deaths are brought prominently forward, while those of her guilty sisters take place behind the scenes. It is true that their bodies, too, are, and very properly, produced, but not for show. "Even so," says Albany; "*cover their*

faces;" and thus are they concealed from view, while the sublime martyrdom of the royal father is left alone in its grandeur to make the final impression on the subdued mind of the astonished spectator.

The marital relations are not so well defined in *Lear* as the filial obligations. Shakspere, therefore, projected another tragedy, to present his ideal as to those. It is, accordingly, given in *Troilus and Cressida*, which sets forth the difference between licit and illicit love. Here, after the earnest work of passion in *Lear*, the poet sports with his theme, and no longer seeks sympathy, but admiration, or the cold smile of ironical indifference. Marriage and passion without sentiment are his themes, and the need of it in both forms the moral of his play. The didactic passages are the finest; and, in treating gravely and magniloquently of the bases and relations of government and authority, the meditative poet found argument an agreeable change from the emotional strain which he must have suffered in the composition of his great tragedy. The heroes of the Homeric age he treats with uncommon familiarity; and they move about in the old scenes like "children of a larger growth," engaged in discussions that make the camp like a schoolroom. But the themes are of the greatest moment to society, and the eloquence displayed is the grandest conceivable. Thoughts and figures nearly in every speech crowd together; a surging sea of metaphors and images saturates the banks of a too-copious speech, enriching the flowery margin with fertility, like that which follows the overflow of the

Nile, but which here rises in magical abundance on the instant. Such a prodigality of poetic diction is not elsewhere to be met with;—no, not even within the covers of the wondrous volume that contains these examples of a genius beyond compare.

Shakspere has treated the characters of Troilus and Cressida with much tender respect. He has placed them in the best light he could, attributing to the latter a vehement passion grounded in a warmth of temperament, and to the former an affectionate and instinctive nature that had yielded only to the strong necessity of loving, because too young and inexperienced to resist the impulses of desire and the promptings of an excited fancy. Cressida, guided by temporary preference, changing the object of her devotion, sinks in the sequel into the degradation that awaits wanton and faithless spirits; but Troilus rises above the mere caprice of desire, and establishes himself on a final determination of the will to the practice of his duties, which his previous fondness had almost induced him to neglect. For the rest, it was Shakspere's purpose, in the general texture of his drama, to insist on the superiority of Intellect to Brute Force.

From the grand to the graceful is but a step; it was the next taken by Shakspere in the noble play of *Cymbeline*. Here, too, we have a mixture of legend and chronicle, romance and history, comprising a multitude of events extending over a wide area, most skilfully varied, and combined in the end with the greatest judgment. A large canvas is occupied with many figures, truly delineated and effectively con-

nected. The greatest care is taken with the catastrophe, over the production of which Shakspere here exhibits the utmost mastery. In portraying the character of Imogen, we may see with what delight he welcomed the opportunity of painting woman in her purity. Imogen is almost an abstraction, the embodied principle of affection. Woman is Love, say the Sonnets. Beauty is Man. Imogen is all love—her love is religion; and to her Posthumus is the paragon of men—the god of her idolatry. She is the most touching of all martyrs—the lamb that entreats the butcher—for she is devoted to the altar, and yearns to become its sacrifice. Her religion is to be true and constant; her fidelity is unutterable. This idea is, in the play, carried out in other characters, and the prevailing coincidence, most subtly maintained, operates as the inner life of the organism, and gifts it with a soul of harmony, like that which the Platonist recognises as the silent music of creation. Hazlitt perceives the fact in this drama; but not, as we have previously done, that it is Shakspere's uniform method. Nor does he recognise it as conscious art in the poet; but thinks that, "as the impression exists unconsciously in the mind of the reader, so it probably arose in the same manner in the mind of the author, not from design, but from the force of natural association, a particular train of thought suggesting different inflections of the same predominant feeling, melting into, and strengthening one another, like chords in music." In this the critic is mistaken; we have too many proofs of Shakspere's practice to doubt

that the method so happily applied was adopted in full and perfect consciousness. Ben Jonson's idea of Shakspere is the only true one, that as a poet he was an Artist. Nor was he an Artist only—he was a philosopher.

We find the same attention to the preparation of the last scene in the *Winter's Tale*, the catastrophe of which is as beautiful as it is happy. This drama, however, is not so complex as its immediate predecessors. Principally it recognises a duality. Thus it consists of two actions, connected by the scene concluding the third act. At the same time that Leontes loses his wife, Paulina loses her husband; and when the former is again blest with Hermione, the latter is accommodated with a second spouse.

Poems live according to the degree and amount of life in them; and that is greatest in organisms of complex structure. The dramas just enumerated are, with one exception, the most frequently acted, and take especially precedence of those which were produced in the first seven years of Shakspere's labour, save only *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet.* Their tragic intensity has saved them. The first owes its remarkable popularity to its supernatural interest, which is also of a serious sort. The writer who believed that "there is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow," was evidently a reverent believer in the New Testament, and one who would also believe that, during the darkness at the Crucifixion, the spirits of departed saints forsook their graves and appeared unto many. The super-

natural in *Macbeth* is of a similar character—solemn and profound, not light and airy like that of the *Midsummer-Night's Dream.* Nor had it to be invented. It had already secured its hold on popular credulity, and had therefore only to be adopted.

Accordingly, Shakspere is enabled to strike the key-note at once, and presents the weird-sisters on the heath, at the very opening of the play, without a word of explanation; knowing that they will appeal to the vulgar faith as witches (though it is his design to make of them something more, as exponents of the superstitious mind), and therefore that his first step is secure, and will render more easy the second. In his treatment of these superstitions Shakspere is a decided rationalist. Hamlet, though he has seen a ghost, doubts its individual objectivity; and Macbeth, in his intercourse with the witches, acts wholly on subjective motives. The murder of Duncan is not at all dependent on their prophecies, any more than the fact that Banquo's issue were the future kings of Scotland. With or without such greetings, such facts are inevitable. Things take their natural and political course without reference to men's creeds.

Macbeth, though ambitious like Richard III., and a homicide and usurper, is nevertheless distinguished from him by humanities which secure our sympathies both in his crimes and his destiny. We *are* Macbeth as much as we are Hamlet, while Richard repels us, and we regard him from a distance not so much as a man but a fiend. Dramatically, the witches are, in fact, the "screens" of the "noble Thane," and

serve as the scape-goats of his guilt. The spectator, unmindful of the metaphysics of the drama, pities Macbeth as subject to their influence and deluded into crime. He does not reflect that "every man when he is tempted is led away of his own lusts and enticed." Shakspere knew this, and conceived his action accordingly; but he has concealed it skilfully, except for those who, seeking the Inner Life of his dramas, penetrate beneath the veil with which it has pleased the mighty artist to drape its form. For every drama, however high its aim and attainment as tragedy, is still a mystery, and partakes of the religious character of its origin.

The five tragic plays that have legendary or half-legendary themes are abstractedly ideal and purely poetic, and stand to those that follow as universal propositions, of which historical examples are about to be given. These examples are furnished in the cycle of the three Roman plays, which are all devoted to the development of one idea—the genesis of the tyrant in a state. The persons in these plays are of the highest class of character, and become individualised by the exercise of will. Reason, understanding, sense are added, and complete a complex organism, which from their conflicts and combinations render the character as intricate as the drama of which it is the central head. And, after all, it is the history of mankind that is represented in these plays and in the persons of Coriolanus, Cæsar, and Antony. "That history," says an astute critic, "is a romance, a mask, a tragedy, constructed upon the principles of

poetical justice ;—it is a noble or royal hunt, in which what is sport to the few is death to the many, and in which the spectators halloo and encourage the strong to set upon the weak, and cry havoc in the chase though they do not share in the spoil." Our republican reviewer, however, forgets that the "poetical justice" of the Shaksperian drama compels the death of Coriolanus and Cæsar, and the suicide of Antony; and this notwithstanding their completeness as examples of human character. In one point they are deficient. They are not obedient to conscience, or their conscience needs enlightenment. That enlightenment came by the Christian revelation, of which unfortunately they were not partakers.

The hero of *The Tempest* is of a still higher reach. His conscience and will are at one, and his magic unveils for him the face of nature, and shows him the intelligence behind. His power is equal to his volition. All this may be predicated of an enchanted island, of an ideal paradise; but not of the world. Timon's mistake was in supposing that the world was made in the image of his own mind, and obedient to his desires. He had miscalculated the gratitude of men, and neglected to consider the fickleness of Fortune. On the latter the poet fixed his attention particularly, and illustrated it consciously in the sad reverses which beset all his characters in the play of *Henry VIII.* The reign of that monarch, however, represented a crisis in the history of the world, when a great change came upon men and institutions, to inaugurate an era yet in progress—a cycle of deve-

lopment to which we of this century belong, and great part of which development we have yet to realise—whereof the mission was and is, the destruction of the Conventional, in order to its reconstruction in a better form, with a higher aim, and greater means of accomplishing the Ideal, which it is the purpose of society from age to age to promote, and finally to embody.

Thus we recognise in these dramas of our Immortal Bard a perpetual genesis, one suggesting another, and each a growth referable to a preceding production; and in their author a living expanding force, which, among the forces of the universe, maintained a constant action and reaction; and whose genius, like the brain of Jupiter, gave birth, not once but many times, to a Pallas, fully armed, and so equipped as to take her immediate place among the astonished deities, and thereafter to withstand the assaults of even titan critics, who, rashly impeaching either the wisdom of her parent or her own, could only show their fatuity and incapacity by their failure to appreciate a product so divine. Such a Minerva is every genuine work of Shakspere; and such is the character which we claim for all and each of the thirty-five dramas, which prove themselves to be his by signs not to be mistaken; the majority wholly his, and the remainder indebted to his participation in them for being what they are.

The genius that thus manifests its productivity by the process of growth assumes at once Nature's own level, and acts like her by like means and for like ends. The largest and most fertile minds of such as

so work are the poetic. These are happy intelligences, which by the strength of will and a fortunate correspondence of natural conditions, select for themselves a living path, and pursue it unweariedly, until their mission is fulfilled. To secure perfection in such work the chosen path should also be exclusively followed. A Shakspere and a Wordsworth seek not to shine as authors in any way except as poets. Verse and rhythm are to them necessities of style; metaphors and figures, similes, subtleties of diction and allusion, concealed allegories, artifices of wit, caprices of fanciful conceit, and unexpected images, are inevitable from the perpetual and living activity with which the creative soul permeates, supports, and enlivens every part of the composition, whence every sentence and segment of a sentence is as much an organism as an entire speech or the whole play. From this source springs the opulence of Shakspere's diction, the excess of poetic ornament, in which some have recognised a too soaring imagination, a too luxuriant wit. Modern dramatists have affected a simpler dialogue, which Schlegel has rightly censured as "originating in a fanciless way of thinking, to which every thing appears unnatural that does not suit its own tame insipidity; owing to which attempts are made at simple and natural pathos, which consists in exclamations destitute of imagery, and nowise elevated above every-day life." But, as the same author afterwards states, "energetical passions electrify the whole of the mental powers, and will consequently, in highly-favoured natures, express themselves in an ingenious and figu-

rative manner." This is the style of the oriental writers in the Bible, and the style of Shakspere in his dramas. It is that of the loftiest and largest minds; let inferior ones not venture within the magic circle, but, retiring in modesty and at a distance, remain outside, not to question, but adore.

The aim and ambition of the Elizabethan dramatists, and of Shakspere in particular, was to reach the Sublime and Beautiful in poetic composition. Believers in the Platonic philosophy, they sought for its fountain in Mind; in the human intelligence as the image of the divine. In the spontaneous action of the great faculties with which man is endowed, and which hold of the infinite and eternal, they recognised that inter-play of ideas and images which best expresses the paramount influence of Love and the energetic promptings of the Will; and while they represented these as irresistible impulses, they took note of the resistance they met with in nature and society, however they might overbear it, as an obstruction that irritated and insulted powers created for freedom, thereby exciting them to demonstrations of such extreme anger and fury as to threaten with ruin whatever might attempt to coerce or to limit their headlong operation. No possible convulsion of the material universe could equal these earthquakes of the heart, these tempests of the soul, when they were saucily questioned by local conventions or temporary authorities. The beings gifted with such lofty attributes at once assumed the attitude of gods, and challenged the universe, as if in right of their proper immortality, to

a combat in which they were secure of victory. Such is the source of the Shaksperian sublime. It is a kind of divine madness; but it is nevertheless an indubitable inspiration. It flashes on the page, and suddenly irradiates it as with a blaze of lightning: it is terrible, but fugitive. Dr. Johnson foolishly complained of our poet, that "what he does best, he soon ceases to do. He no sooner begins to move than he counteracts himself; and terror and pity, as they are rising in the mind, are checked and blasted by sudden frigidity." When these flashes have vanished, of course comparative darkness is left in their place. The sublime cannot be constantly maintained. It must come and go; were its continuance permitted, we should be lost in continuous glory, and find refuge only from its excess in blindness. Where such an attempt is made as Dr. Johnson would suggest, the result is bombast, or such stilted writing as renders his own *Irene* both unactable and unreadable.

The beautiful is of a more abiding character. It remains for inspection. Its course is not rapid and direct, but circuitous and slow. Shakspere could arrest himself in his noblest flights and assume the gentleness of humility. A change of tone, a pathetic touch, a play on words, will serve him as conductor, rendering the lightning harmless. Then the landscape shines out again in loveliness, the verdure of the field sparkles to the azure sky, and the bright rainbow tenderly spans the humid air. Such diversions are frequent in Shakspere. Sometimes between two stormy displays of passion he places a lovely description that

lends relief and repose, and becomes an enduring charm to the reflective student. Sometimes a gentle sentiment, a pleasant irony, a harmless jest, affords the requisite variety. Such a disposition of light and shadow is generally the result of acquired taste. With Shakspere it appears to have been natural. His taste, like his genius, was an inspiration. Nor was his native judgment inferior to either. In the distribution of faculties to him there was a singular equality, all derivable from heavenly sources, all directed to beautiful ends.

The mind of Shakspere was not at all sectarian, but thoroughly secular. With what divine impartiality he portrays all the characters in *Henry VIII.!* each in some respects almost an individuate merely, being what he is by the law of his position, yet how decidedly individualised, so that you see the distinct moral personality. It is Will struggling against Destiny—man victimised by fate. Whatever may be the fault of Buckingham, Wolsey, Katharine, Bullen, or Cranmer, their rise or fall is no wise owing thereto, but to the law of change then in full operation in human affairs. Hence every one has claims on our sympathy; and each is of equal importance and worth in the eyes of their Creator. He is not swayed in favour of any one by his creed, new or old, but simply assigns him his position on the historical canvas, and having painted him in, in his proper likeness, leaves him for recognition. Such secularity of mind is a rare gift, and is even sometimes denied to great artists. It enabled Shakspere to become the greatest

of all. I would not by the use of this phrase lead the reader to suppose that I therefore imply that a greater is not hereafter possible. The themes of Shakspere's dramas are, after all, limited. They are comprised within certain periods, and do not overstep the developments of those periods. Reverential as Shakspere always shows himself to be wherever the ministers of religion are concerned, his men and women have none of those spiritual difficulties and temptations under which subsequent individuals have suffered. Scepticism, infidelity, rationalism, and the doubts and hopes that have beset some of the noblest minds who, down to the French Revolution and since, have dared to augur for the race a possible perfectibility—these have not in the remotest manner entered into the scheme of his dramas. There, too, are the feelings of the artist, and the sentimentalities of the highly-cultivated of both sexes, fraught as they are with miseries and felicities which surpass all that arise out of the more worldly relations of life, on which Shakspere has scarcely touched. These have been the developments of an after age, and many more await the future. A wide and still wider field opens on the dramatist; and that Providence, which aforetime provided a cosmic soul comprehensive of the past, will doubtless provide another suitable for the coming ages. It is the more needful to dwell on this, because it has been the practice of some actors and critics to preach despair to the rising poet, and to proclaim the impossibility of progress. Certain lovers of Shakspere, too, think it due to his dignity

that some such doctrine should be held. Shakspere assuredly, in his own way, is inimitable, or only to be imitated at a manifest disadvantage. Meanwhile the selfish actor constitutes himself Shakspere's representative, and is jealous of rival claims. This is simply absurd! The actor of the present time represents the actors of the past time, and not the poets. He represents Kean, Kemble, Garrick, Quin, Burbadge; but he does not represent Shakspere as a poet. None but the poet can do this; and the noblest memorial that can be raised to him is a modern drama equal to his own. But of this there is small chance under the present system of theatrical management. Revivals and translations have their stages; but for original modern poetical drama there is none. Occasionally room is found for a solitary venture, under the least favourable circumstances, and its non-success being foredoomed and anticipated, a new reason is found in its failure for not speedily trying the experiment again. A new poetical drama cannot be created under such auspices. Shakspere's own progress was gradual; and, like inferior artists, he had to learn his art by constant or frequent practice. Years elapsed before he was capable of his greater works. The poet of the future, too, must be permitted like him to command the stage, in order that he may select those themes which best fit the state of his mind at the time, according to the laws of genesis and growth, without reference to their popularity. His works should grow in stature as his mind does, and stimulate the mind of the audience to a similar growth and eleva-

tion. It is hard to say what specific arrangements would best conduce to this desirable end; but it is clear that the existing ones have all a tendency in precisely the opposite direction. It would argue a disbelief in that Providence which has evidently made in all countries the drama the object of special institution, as one of the best instruments for educating mankind by example and precept, and uniformly connected it in its origin with the offices of religion; however it may have been its destiny to outgrow them, and assert a distinct *status* of its own, that thereby it might become an antagonist of hypocrisy, the more effective as independent of ecclesiastical censure: it would, I say, argue a disbelief in that gracious Providence, were we to suppose that better arrangements could not arise out of the free conditions which now exist. But verily the process threatens to be a long one, unless promoted by some authoritative influence, whose working shall be separated from that of the mere trading speculator, to whose temporary and imaginary interests those of art and the public are uniformly sacrificed. Whenever that higher influence shall be fairly exerted, it will be found that England yet possesses a large amount of poetic dramatic genius. It is time that some effort were made. Let the wealthy and intelligent take it really to heart; and the drama of the age of Elizabeth may yet be paralleled by that of the reign of Victoria.

APPENDIX A.

A NEW VIEW OF SHAKSPERE'S SONNETS.

AN INDUCTIVE CRITIQUE.

(Reprinted from *Temple Bar*, April 1862.)

A GERMAN writer has recently projected a new theory in regard to the vexed question of Shakspere's Sonnets. The theory is very characteristic of the national mind, carried, however, to an extreme, so as to be almost an example of the *reductio ad absurdum*. His notion is, that the poet's dedication "To W.H." means to *William Himself*, and that all the personal apostrophes are directed to his interior Individuality. This, as I have suggested, is too German. Yet I can see clearly how it is that the critic has found the hypothesis help him in understanding this mysterious series of poems. The ordinary notion, in fact, that because the poems are dedicated to W.H. they are necessarily addressed to the dedicatee, is about as absurd as the merely subjective notion of the Teutonic critic. After a careful reperusal, I have come to the conclusion that there is not a single sonnet which is addressed to any individual at all; and that there is an obvious point of view, in which not only the general drift and design of all the sonnets, as a connected whole, become apparent enough, but the details also abundantly intelligible. I proceed to show the grounds of my position, and to add such illustrations as it may require.

The sonnets were written long before they were published, and dedicated to W.H.; or, as it is generally supposed, Lord Southampton. Before this dedication took place, Shakspere had distinguished himself as a dramatist, and therefore naturally sought the patronage of the nobleman who had the management of the drama at court. He had already dedicated to him his *Venus and Adonis* and *Tarquin and Lucrece*, in 1593 and 1594; and the sub-

ject of the sonnets had no more special relation to his lordship than had the themes of those two remarkable poems.

The German's notion of the sonnets being purely subjective is refuted by the impossibility of the thing. A purely subjective philosophy did not then exist, and an objective poet like Shakspere was not likely to be its initiator. Undoubtedly there is subjective matter in all Shakspere's works; but he had formed no exclusive theory of the sort, if any theory at all. That Shakspere's philosophy is identical with Bacon's is sufficiently proved by Delia Bacon, though she has of course failed in attempting to prove that he is not the author of his own plays. The manner in which she has applied the Negative Instances of the Baconian philosophy, and the marvellous results she brings out by the process, are perfectly convincing on this point. Now Bacon's induction combines both the subjective and objective in one common method; the Shaksperian drama does the same. We can scarcely, therefore, err in applying the Baconian method of induction to an examination of the sonnets.

I begin, and shall, indeed, altogether conduct the inquiry with and by inferences. The first seventeen sonnets, I find, are all pervaded with the same theme—a declaration against celibacy. In this we find Shakspere expressing the Protestant feeling of the time, and moving with the age. That Shakspere, notwithstanding that in his dramatic capacity he appears to hold the balance pretty even between the claims of the two Churches, was thoroughly Protestant, even to an extreme, is abundantly evident. High-Church and High-State principles are treated by him in a peculiar manner. In *Richard II.*, for instance, we find them stated with great force by the poor king; but ultimately they so fail him as to deprive him at the same time both of his theory and his throne. The truth which he had worshipped becomes falsehood: what, during the fourteenth century, had been orthodox political doctrine, is proved to be the most practical of errors at the end. With the new age, new principles must prevail, and Bolingbroke succeeds to the new inheritance. In the previous tragedy, *King John*, an express declaration is made against the papacy; and how true he was to the principles of the Reformation is manifest in his dramas of *Measure for Measure*, *Love's Labour's lost*, &c., where Angelo doubtless represents the Pontiff, and the state he rules over allegorises the Church; and where the declara-

tion against celibacy is repeated with humoristic force, and corroborated with philosophic argument. Nature is thoroughly vindicated. The vice that Angelo would suppress is declared to be of "a great kindred; it is well allied; but it is *impossible* to extirp it quite, friar, till eating and drinking be put down." Ecclesiastical authority had included marriage and license in the same category; and no man could claim to be a saint who was not also a celibate, or rather esteemed to be so, for the *impossibility* of all being sincere in this assumption made many to be hypocrites. Against this monstrous injustice the sonneteer utters his protest in the first seventeen sonnets. Each has but one moral, repeated sixteen times. Why this iteration and reiteration, but to enforce a truth with which time was teeming, and which was already destined to inaugurate a new and better age?

We must trace the course of the poet's argument. In introducing it, he apostrophises a supposed individual who has resolved on celibacy,—one who was selfishly "contracted to his own bright eyes,"—who would make a famine where there was abundance,—who "within his own bud would bury his content,"—and finally, by his absurd conduct and example, hasten on the end of the world. In these topics the whole of the proposed argument is well-nigh involved; but the poet is intent on enlarging on each and all. He reminds the ideal celibate that at the age of forty his brow will become wrinkled, and that, not having a child to image his former beauty, he will have no living evidence of its existence. In the next place, he urges that celibacy is unjust to the individual, to the world, and to the opposite sex. It is also contrary to nature.

"Unthrifty loveliness, why dost thou spend
Upon thyself thy beauty's legacy?
Nature's bequest gives nothing, but doth lend,
And, being frank, she lends to those are free.
Then, beauteous niggard, why dost thou abuse
The bounteous largess given thee to give?
Profitless usurer, why dost thou use
So great a sum of sums, yet canst not live?
For, having traffic with thyself alone,
Thou of thyself thy sweet self dost deceive.
Then how, when nature calls thee to begone,
What acceptable audit canst thou leave?
Thy unused beauty must be tomb'd with thee,
Which, used, lives, thy executor to be."

The law of nature which had been thus violated, the reformation of religion was to reassert. But to continue the analysis, with as little comment as possible.

The poet, in the fifth sonnet, proceeds to point out that there is progress in nature and in the seasons. Winter will come at last, and annihilation would ensue, but that nature provides for the same succession another year. In the sixth sonnet, the celibate is called on to make a like provision; the poet justly urging that the use of the gift of reproduction is not invalidated by the abuse of it, and that the fact of such reproduction is man's conquest over Death. The point is enforced with an earnestness almost sublime:

> "Then, what could Death do if thou shouldst depart,
> Leaving thee living in posterity?
> Be not self-will'd, for thou art much too fair
> To be Death's conquest, and make worms thine heir."

And now follows an exquisite sonnet, comparing sunrise and sunset. As the sun climbs his way to the mid-heaven, mortals look up and adore. But when he descends into the west, all eyes are turned into the opposite direction.

> "So thou thyself, out-going in thy noon,
> Unlook'd on diest, unless thou get a son."

The eighth sonnet also illustrates the same argument, by a simile taken from harmony in music, and by a picture in which "sire, and child, and happy mother" are all engaged in "singing one pleasing note." The poet then becomes ironical, and supposes for a moment that the celibate chooses a "single life" out of "fear to wet a widow's eye." But he urges that, if he dies childless, the world will be his widow, and himself be guilty of a "murderous shame;" a suicide who loves others as little as he really loves himself. The next sonnet continues the same topic, and condemns him also of a "murderous hate."

Coleridge somewhere remarks of Shakspere's characters, that each is "a translucence of the universal in the individual." The poet, in his sonnets, accordingly seeks to individualise his celibate, and assumes that he is "fair" to look upon, "gracious and kind" in manner, and therefore the more guilty in not being "kind-hearted." And now he calls upon him to consider that,

if all men were of his mind, the world itself would only last threescore years; adding:

"Let those whom nature hath not made for store,
Harsh, featureless, and rude, barrenly perish.
Look, whom she best endow'd, she gave thee more;
Which bounteous gift thou shouldst in bounty cherish.
She carved thee for her seal, and meant thereby
Thou shouldst print more, nor let that copy die."

By assuming these individual advantages for the person supposed to be addressed, the poet much strengthens his argument. Some of these sonnets read as if they were addressed by another Venus to her Adonis; and it may have been the poet's wish that we should understand them as spoken by a woman. The terms of endearment in the following and other sonnets would then be intelligible enough:

"O that you were yourself! But, love, you are
No longer yours than you yourself here live.
Against this coming end you should prepare,
And your sweet semblance to some other give.
So should that beauty which you hold in lease
Find no determination; then you were
Yourself again, after yourself's decease,
When your sweet issue your sweet form should bear.
Who lets so fair a house fall to decay,
Which husbandry in honour might uphold
Against the stormy gusts of winter's day,
And barren rage of death's eternal cold?
Oh, none but unthrifts! Dear my love, you know,
You had a father: let your son say so."

However this may be, the poet in his own person addresses the celibate, and refers to his own rhymes with satisfaction, inasmuch as they aim to convert him to a more natural course of living. "Who will," he exclaims,—

"Who will believe my verse in time to come,
If it were fill'd with your most high deserts?
Though yet, Heaven knows, it is but as a tomb
Which hides your life, and shows not half your parts.
If I could write the beauty of your eyes,
And in fresh numbers number all your graces,
The age to come would say the poet lies;
Such heavenly touches ne'er touch'd earthly faces.

> So should my papers, yellow'd with their age,
> Be scorn'd, like old men of less truth than tongue;
> And your true rights be term'd a poet's rage,
> And stretchèd metre of an antique song:
> But were some child of yours alive that time,
> You should live twice;—in it, and in my rhyme."

And so the poet closes his exordium, having thus sufficiently stated his proposition.

And here we may suitably advert to a remark of Coleridge's, namely, that Shakspere's minor poems suggest all the power in him of becoming a great dramatist, and this because he was already a great poet. He had shown in them that he was not only capable of writing well on personal topics, but of becoming other than himself in his power of realising objects and persons. He could "become all things, and yet remain the same;" he could "make the changeful god be felt in the river, the lion, and the flame." And thus it is that, in the *Venus and Adonis*, "Shakspere writes as if he were of another planet, charming you to gaze on the movements of the lovers as you would on the twinkling dances of two vernal butterflies. Finally," the critic proceeds, "in this poem, and the *Rape of Lucrece*, Shakspere gave ample proof of his possession of a most profound, energetic, and philosophical mind, without which he might have pleased, but could not have been a great *dramatic* poet."

Thus also, in these sonnets, Shakspere states his proposition dramatically, and portrays a person in whom it might be embodied. His subject is stated as an Object which he may and does apostrophise. Having so stated it, he proceeds logically to its distribution. Its elements are twofold: those that relate to Love, and those that concern Beauty. In treating of Beauty, he does not appropriate the attribute to the opposite sex, but simply as the property of Man. In the 18th, 19th, and 20th sonnets, his theme is Masculine Bēauty; in the last, he recognises evidently an aristocratic type, and describes a man with features and manners soft and lovely as a woman's, but furnished with all the forces by which he can command those of his own sex and fascinate the other, and plenarily endowed with all that could administer pleasure to his partner and insure the reproduction of his own image. He paints, in fact, the sensual man in his noblest type. But he does not stop here. Having thus evidenced "his deep feeling and exquisite sense of beauty," and also that he could "project

his mind out of his own particular being, and feel, and make others feel, on subjects no way connected with himself, except by force of contemplation, and that sublime faculty by which a great mind becomes that on which it meditates;"—he passes out of the dramatist into the poet, and invests the object of his apostrophe —as he invariably did even his most dramatic characters—with the gifts of his rich imagination and copious affections. His type-man becomes an ideal, and is furnished out of his own mind and heart with the requisite attributes. This he confesses:

> "My glass shall not persuade me I am old,
> So long as youth and thou are of one date;
> But when in thee Time's furrows I behold,
> Then look I death my days should expiate.
> For all that beauty that doth cover thee
> Is but the seemly raiment of my heart,
> Which in thy breast doth live, as this in me:
> How can I then be elder than thou art?"

This *quasi* identification of the subject and object doubtless suggested to the German critic the notion on which he has proceeded, that the poet throughout addressed himself. The error is very pardonable, but easily corrected. It was not his *ego*, but his *alter-ego*, in the ideal personality, in the universal humanity, that the poet apostrophised. We shall see presently how he takes the Platonic side of the Baconian philosophy, and ascends to an intuition little short of the theological one, and only avoiding it by the shade of a degree. Man becomes all but the theistic *logos* in the ascending scale of the poet's daring apprehension, and, but for his evident predetermination to keep on this side of the religious aspects of his subject (a predetermination also marked in such of his dramas as allegorise sacred ideas, such as *The Tempest*, *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, *Love's Labour's lost*, *Measure for Measure*, &c.), would no doubt have been expressly named as such. By this wise reticence the poet has gained much, and given a classical air to what otherwise would have borne a controversial one,—

> "A passion hateful to his purposes."

And thus we have in this series of sonnets one entire poem, containing a protest against an expiring superstition, philosophically conducted, but conveyed in the language of poetry,—a diction divested of technical terms; and this was the method of the

Italian poets in treating religious or political subjects, which they disguised in mystical or erotic verses. Love is made the cover of much heterodox sentiment, the object of which is sometimes painted as a mistress, in others as a friend. And thus the danger which might have followed on plain speaking was avoided. We may see the same topics similarly treated in Biron's closing speech in *Love's Labour's lost*, act iv.

His foot once on the steps of the "intellectual ladder," Shakspere mounts with equal rapidity and daring. He is occupied with his work day and night: the subject is ever present with him. Shakspere, like another Prometheus, is the Friend of Man, and in turn regards Man as his friend. Ever, even in darkness, his "soul's imaginary sight presents the shadow" of that collective Object "to his sightless view." He is filled with its beauty, *i.e.* the beauty of Man, that "beauty of the world, that paragon of animals," as in *Hamlet* he so affectionately denominates that total humanity of which he was himself so glorious an example. Addressing it as an imaginary object, he says, in his 28th sonnet,

> "I tell the day, to please him, thou art bright,
> And dost him grace, when clouds do blot the heaven.
> So flatter I the swart-complexion'd night:
> When sparkling stars twire not, thou gild'st the even."

And in the next he thus disposes of his personal relation therewith—how beautifully, how tenderly, how grandly!

> "When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
> I all alone beweep my outcast state,
> And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
> And look upon myself, and curse my fate,
> Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
> Featured like him, like him with friends possess'd,
> Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
> With what I most enjoy contented least;
> Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
> Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
> Like to the lark at break of day arising
> From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
> For thy sweet love remember'd, such wealth brings,
> That then I scorn to change my state with kings."

In this fine sonnet I read the biography thoroughly of the actor and the poet. The whole life of Shakspere is essentialised

in it. In all his sorrows and disappointments, the thought of the ideal man, as he tells us in the next three sonnets, is his great comfort; his hopes, his aspirations, his shortcomings, have all their bourn and limit therein. It is his "*sun* of the world;" nevertheless, as is the case with all ideals, he has been betrayed by it. The morning opened fair enough, and he was tempted to "travel forth without his cloak;" but he finds a sufficient excuse in the fact, that he was accessory himself to the illusion. After all, the individual is not the ideal; and he thus makes allowance for the necessary disparity:

> "Let me confess that we *two must be twain*,
> Although our undivided loves are one;
> So shall those blots that do with me remain
> Without thy help by me be borne alone."

There is more to the same effect. But whatever the deficiencies of the individual, they are all supplied in the ideal.

> "I in thy abundance am sufficed,
> And *by a part of all thy glory live*."

> "How can my Muse want subject to invent,
> While thou dost breathe, that pour'st into my verse
> Thine own sweet argument, too excellent
> For every vulgar paper to rehearse?
> Oh, give thyself the thanks, if aught in me
> Worthy perusal stand against thy sight;
> For who's so dumb that cannot write to thee,
> When thou thyself dost give invention light?
> Be thou the tenth Muse——"

Yes, it is fit that the ideal should be the poet's inspirer. Yet how shall it be distinguished from himself?

> "What can mine own praise to mine own self bring?
> And what is't but mine own when I praise thee?"

Yet distinction *is* made, and the implied *separation* is assumed as similar to what "absence" is to a lover. Pursuing the thought, the verse becomes burdened with amorous complaints, allied with many conceits that sometimes claim a license in these days of literal accuracy but grudgingly allowed.

And here the poet, weary of illustrating the theme of Masculine Beauty, turns gradually to the consideration of the second element in the distribution of the subject; namely, Love. Mention is suddenly made of a Woman beloved by the Man, of whom

the sonneteer lovingly feigns himself to be jealous. His jealousy is twofold; both on account of her love for the ideal object, and of his for her. And this must needs be so; for as a portion of the universal humanity, the Woman is as ideal as the Man, and as dear to his apostrophiser. The poet is even fond of making a sort of riddle of the necessary correlations, playing with them thus:

"That thou hast her, it is not all my grief,
And yet it may be said, I loved her dearly;
That she hath thee, is of my wailing chief,
A loss in love that touches me more nearly.
Loving offenders, thus I will excuse ye:
Thou dost love her, because thou know'st I love her;
And for my sake even so she doth abuse me,
Suffering my friend for my sake to approve her.
If I lose thee, my loss is my love's gain,
And losing her, my friend hath found that loss;
Both find each other, and I lose both twain,
And both for my sake *lay on me this cross;*
But here's the joy: *my friend and I are one.*
Sweet flattery!—then she loves but me alone."

This sonnet might go far to prove the truth of the German's subjective theory. For does not the poet himself declare, that the Ideal Man, the Friend, whom he has addressed, has all along been identified with himself—has simply been his Objective Self? And verily, in some sort, this "Self Love and Social *are* the same." It is the love of the One for the Many; but the Many, how multitudinous soever, are yet properly but the reflex of the One, and the sum of both is the Universe. That Shakspere saw this as clearly as any German sage of later times is to me manifest; but he had not theorised it. He deals with it in the Italian manner, as a tissue of conceits, with which the poetic mind delights to sport, and which demonstrates its indefinite activity of thought, as instanced in a variety of associations almost infinite, even condescending to a mere play of words, sometimes even to the perpetration of the poorest puns.

I feel that I have now given the reader the key-note to the interpretation of these sonnets for himself; therefore shall hasten over the remainder, only touching on such points as imperatively demand attention.

We find the necessity that the poet felt, of considering the ideal humanity as bisexual, removes the object to a farther dis-

tance from the merely subjective feeling that he would indulge, and strengthens the sense of "absence" under which he had formerly imaged their distinction or separation. In the 50th sonnet, he declares his reluctance to realise this new condition. But it is needful, under the second branch of his subject, Love, that the relations of male and female should be acknowledged, and not alone those between man and man. Hence the state which he designates "absence" must be; nor is it barren of benefit to the complaining poet:

"So am I as the rich, whose blessèd key
Can bring him to his sweet up-lockèd treasure,
The which he will not every hour survey,
For blunting the fine point of seldom pleasure.
Therefore are feasts so solemn and so rare,
Since seldom coming, in the long year set,
Like stones of worth, they thinly placèd are,
Or captain jewels in the carcanet.
So is the time that keeps you, as my chest,
Or as the wardrobe which the robe doth hide,
To make some special instant special blest
By new unfolding his imprison'd pride.
Blessèd are you, whose worthiness gives scope,
Being had, to triumph; being lack'd, to hope."

The exquisite sonnet just quoted is unparalleled for the beauty and appropriateness of imagery, as well as for subtlety of thought. In the next sonnet he as finely paints his human ideal in the persons of the two sexes—expressly.

"What is your substance, whereof are *you* made,
That millions of strange shadows on *you* tend?
Since every one hath, every one, one shade,
And *you*, but one, can every shadow lend.
Describe Adonis, and the counterfeit
Is poorly imitated after *you*;
On Helen's cheek all art of beauty set,
And *you* in Grecian tires are painted new.
Speak of the spring and foison of the year;
The one doth shadow of *your* beauty show,
The other as *your* bounty doth appear;
And *you* in every blessed shape we know.
In all external grace *you* have some part,
But *you* like none, none *you*, for constant heart."

Observe, too, that in the above two and more recent sonnets the second personal pronoun is changed from the singular to the plural. It is no longer "thou" and "thee," but "you." What

is said in the last sonnet cannot be meant of any individual;—it is only true of the ideal humanity, which, being but one, is nevertheless manifested in all men and women and nature, as its shadows and appearances. It is, too, the source of virtue and truth in all its human representatives. And the poet proceeds to illustrate these essential attributes of its moral character, which are at once the basis and the evidence of its inevitable Immortality.

> "'Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity
> Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room,
> Even in the eyes of all posterity,
> That wear this world out to the ending doom.
> So to the judgment, that yourself arise,
> You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes."

He now recognises this universal humanity as his sovereign, and makes his submission to its supremacy, while lamenting his distance from it. He would seek compensation, moreover, by finding its

> "image in some antique book,
> Since mind at first in character was done."

In a word, he would compare the heroes of ancient and modern times, that he may form a better conception of its nature (sonnets 57-59). In a subsequent sonnet (61), the sovereign becomes a sacred Power that can send forth its "spirit," so far from home, into *his* deeds to pry; adding,

> "For thee watch I, while thou dost wake elsewhere,
> From me far off, *with others all too near*."

During this metaphysical "absence," the *Adonis* and the *Helen*, in which the ideal had developed, are supposed to disport in some mystic but amorous seclusion, leaving the poet meanwhile to melancholy self-contemplation. The sonnet in which this is expressed again almost justifies the German's theory. It perhaps is entitled to be esteemed the pivot-sonnet of the series.

> "Sin of self-love possesseth all mine eye,
> And all my soul, and all my every part;
> And for this sin there is no remedy,
> It is so grounded inward in my heart.
> Methinks no face so gracious is as mine,
> No shape so true, no truth of such account;
> And for myself my own worth do define,
> As I all other in all worths surmount.
> But when my glass shows me myself indeed,
> Bated and chopp'd with tann'd antiquity,

Mine own self-love quite contrary I read,—
Self so self-loving were iniquity.
'Tis thee (*myself*) that for myself I praise,
Painting my age with beauty of thy days."

Shakspere's course, we have said, is upward. The Ideal has already approached the Divine. Its immortality has been declared; but there is also a mortality confessed: the former of the soul, the latter of the body. On the latter, as equally the condition of every man, the poet sorrowfully meditates, and at some length. But the poet's verses will preserve in everlasting memory himself, or his friend, or both, according to the sense in which we may read them. For death itself, he gives many reasons why we should desire it. And here he hints that he has a rival in another poet, who is equally in favour with his Friend. What between a second acquaintance and a mistress, the sonneteer has to combat both with envy and jealousy. But he is fain to own that his murmurs at these natural dispensations are eminently irrational. He justifies his wronger even, for reasons as subtle as they are numerous, even though he imputes to him many faults, as if he rejoiced that the Removed Object of his addresses, however exalted, should have a fellow-feeling of his own infirmity, derived from personal experience. Whatever his faults, they are capable of vindication by the dignity of his nature,

"As on the finger of a thronèd queen,
The basest jewel will be well-esteem'd."

Again, he dwells pathetically on the "absence," the distance from him, of this still constant friend, though now engaged with other companions, and apparently neglectful of his former pledges. But soon he calls on his Muse indignantly to withdraw all show of blame, and to occupy herself exclusively in praise of the beloved, whose truth we are now told is as indisputable as his beauty. Indeed, the poet Platonises and identifies truth and beauty in the mysterious Person for whom he cherishes so deep a love. Beauty thus at one with Truth is immortal and ever young:

"To me, fair friend, you never can be old,
For as you were, when first your eye I eyed,
Such seems your beauty still."

Yet he fears, unreasonably, that unsuspected decay may somehow inhere; notwithstanding he exclaims:

"Let not my love be called idolatry,
Nor my beloved as an idol show,
Since all alike my songs and praises be,
To one, of one, still such, and ever so."

And thus he pursues the contradictions and antinomies which perplex philosophy and try the faith of love, growing up in the soil—the heart—that they infest. It is the old contest between the carnal and moral, erotically expressed. Familiar terms are preferred; thus, the "fair friend who never can be old;" that immortal youth whose absence he deplores the poet now addresses as "sweet boy," and boasts of his "eternal love;" and then, excusing his own wanderings, of which before he had said nothing, by his repentings and returnings, exclaims enthusiastically,

"For nothing this wide universe I call,
Save thou, my rose; in it thou art my all."

In the next sonnet he arrives at the climax; he speaks it out plainly. This "fair friend," this "sweet boy," this "rose" selected from the "wide universe," is—"a God in love:"

"Alas, 'tis true, I have gone here and there,
And made myself a motley to the view;
Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear,
Made old offences of affections new.
Most true it is that I have look'd on truth
Askance and strangely; but by all above,
These blenches gave my heart another youth,
And worst essays proved thee my best of love.
Now all is done, save what shall have no end;
Mine appetite I never more will grind
On newer proof, to try an older friend,
A God in love, to whom I am confined.
Then give me welcome, next my heaven the best,
E'en to thy pure and most, most loving breast."

And thus the poet has completed his Divine Ideal in a Human Form. Comparing himself therewith, he finds himself wanting. He discovers that he is not only merely a part of it, but a part of a part. He is not only an individual, but a speciality. He is a poor theatrical artist—not so much a man as an actor. Not Socrates more strongly denounced this sacrifice of the purely human to the professional, than Shakspere does. The sonnet in which he expresses his regret for this necessity is the best known of the series. What man, conscious of immortal aims, has not felt what it describes?

"O, for my sake do thou with Fortune chide,
The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
That did not better for my life provide
Than public means, which public manners breeds.
Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
And almost thence my nature is subdued
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand:
Pity me then, and wish I were renew'd,
Whilst, like a willing patient, I will drink
Potions of eysell, 'gainst my strong infection;
No bitterness that I will bitter think,
Nor double penance to correct correction.
Pity me then, dear friend, and I assure ye,
Even that your pity is enough to cure me."

The method adopted by the poet in the composition of these serial sonnets is abundantly manifest. They are built up after the fashion, and on the platform, as it were, of a Platonic dialogue. The argument begins with the earthly and animal; but passes, through the intellectual and rational, to the heavenly and divine. Falling back from that sublime contemplation, a sense of his own frailties overwhelms the poet. But he cares nothing, since that celestial friend is his "all the world:"

"In so profound abysm I throw all care
Of others' voices, that my *adder's sense*
To critic and to flatterer stopped are."

Adder's sense, like "lay on me this cross," in a former sonnet, is a scriptural reference; and shows the truth of Hazlitt's statement, that the translation of the Bible had a great influence on the Elizabethan poets and dramatists, both as regards the diction and the tone of thought. And we shall soon see that the poet had now turned his attention indeed to that "pure well of English undefiled." He had carried his subject as far as Plato could help him,—and he was now proceeding to carry it farther, by means of an illumination which Plato wanted. He had opened the Book, and borrowed from it what remains of his argument.

This Celestial Friend he now finds to be mystically represented in all objects, whether of earth or heaven. The meanest are as privileged as the highest to be his symbols. At this the poet wonders, and demands,

"Or whether doth my mind, being crown'd with you,
Drink up the monarch's plague, this flattery?
Or whether shall I say mine eye saith true,
And that your love taught it this alchemy,

To make of monsters and things indigest
Such *cherubims* as your sweet self resemble,
Creating every bad a perfect best,
As fast as objects to his beams assemble?"

Yes, yes; not only the kingdoms of nature animate and inanimate,—"bird, or flower, or shape," "the mountain or the sea, the day or night, the crow or dove;"—but the *cherubims* themselves resemble the marvellous object of his "idolatry." It is evident that words and phrases from the Sacred Oracles may now be expected; for Shakspere has unclasped the Volume, and is poring on its pages. The "deaf adder" and the "cherubims" are both there, and he writes them down, with others still more significant, as we shall soon see. Note, too, how he elevates his conception of Love.

"Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds;
Or bends with the remover to remove:
Oh, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests, and is never shaken."

It is "not Time's fool;" it changes not "to the *edge of doom*." We can see that the poet has adopted the biblical sentiment of a "perfect love that casts out fear." Nay, further, he had even discovered the

"Benefit of ill!—now I find true
That *better is by evil still made better;*
And *ruined love, when it is built anew,*
Grows fairer than at first, more strong, far greater."

Surely it is not necessary to point out the theological meaning of these lines; if it be, let the reader turn for himself to, and read thoughtfully, the seven next sonnets (120-126); after which commences a new theme.

And what a theme! It is the Woman who had gained from the humble friend the affections of the Ideal Man. And here matters have become reversed;—the Woman is portrayed in far other colours. Was the man fair? She is black! Love certainly delighteth in contrasts, and here is an extraordinary one. Desdemona the Moor, and not Othello! Methinks there is here some riddle to read.

There is—but it is one easily read. The lady is black in two senses, morally and physically, in her deeds as well as in her features. She, like the poet's Ideal Friend, has been "foresworn;"

and the poet has in her case likewise to remonstrate, and then to absolve. The like resolution of differences and contradictions is necessary. But, as we have said, the poet has *the* Book open before him. He is in fact reading the Canticles; and there he finds the Bride who is "black but comely"—at once the bride of his Celestial Friend and his own. These confused relations afford the poet an abundant source for quibbles, many of them remarkably pretty, all lovingly playful. In some of them the theological reference slyly peeps out.

> "So now I have confess'd that he is thine,
> And I myself am mortgaged to thy will;
> Myself I'll forfeit, so that other mine
> Thou wilt restore to be my comfort still:
> But thou wilt not, nor will he not be free,
> For thou art covetous, and he is kind:
> *He learn'd but surety-like to write for me,*
> *Under that bond that him as fast doth bind.*
> The statute of thy beauty thou wilt take,
> Thou usurer, that putt'st forth all to use,
> And *sue a friend, come debtor for my sake;*
> So him I lose through my unkind abuse.
> Him have I lost—thou hast both him and me;
> *He pays the whole, and yet I am not free.*"

The language of love and religion are the same, and sometimes that of law assimilates. Some such perception as this here throws Shakspere into a merry mood; and he begins to pun on his Christian name, and to charge all the perjuries at which Jove laughs on his dark beauty, speaking all ill of her, and then recanting; and all this because he does not "love her with his eyes," but with his "heart, that loves what they despise." As it was with Adam in relation to Eve, so with Shakspere in relation to his "darke ladye."

> "Love is my sin, and thy dear virtue hate,
> Hate of my sin, grounded on sinful loving."

In all this, perhaps, Shakspere carries his fancies rather too far. Yet let us not judge him harshly. The terrestrial embodiment of this mysterious woman was self-contradictory, and her appearance at least very equivocal. Hence he wrote:

> "Two loves I have of comfort and despair,
> Which like two spirits do suggest me still;
> The better angel is a man right fair,
> The worser spirit, a woman, colour'd ill.

> To win me soon to hell my female evil
> Tempteth my better angel from my side,
> And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,
> Wooing his purity with her foul pride."

Shakspere found himself between two loves,—the Celibate Church on the one hand, that deified herself; and the Reformed Church on the other, that eschewed Mariolatry, and restored worship to its proper object. Such was his position at the beginning of his argument, which having now exhausted, the circle completes itself, and he finds himself again on the earth, which for a while he had transcended. At once he lowers his tone, and brings the series to an end by some fanciful sonnets, which serve no other purpose than to veil his meaning from the incompetent reader.

This interpretation, which is the pure result of induction, effectually relieves Shakspere from Skottowe's charge of having praised the personal beauty and accomplishments of a youthful friend in a manner "far too ardent to be pleasing." The unclean suggestion belongs alone to the pseudo critic, and leaves the "withers" of the poet "unwrung." The characteristics attributed to this Ideal Friend befit nothing but the Ideal; they never were proper to any actual mortal man. It was common, as I have already said, for poets in his and the previous age so to veil their meaning; signifying religion or government by the term 'love,' and treating them by analogues borrowed from the tender passion. The danger sought to be avoided was not entirely at an end even in Queen Elizabeth's day. The Monarch, as understood by her and her successors down to James II., still clung to the past, though looking forward to the future, and represented *transition* rather than progress. The literary mind, however, was in advance, and instinctively held rather by the coming age, of which it was alike prophetic and productive. It was expedient, therefore, for Shakspere, while writing a series of sonnets expressive of the spirit of that transition, to adopt the usual safeguards. Love, too, and its rights were properly the argument of the Reformation itself, as projected by Luther. It was eminently the emancipation of the natural appetites, within rational limits, from spiritual prohibition,—substituting a possible moderation for an impossible abstinence.

APPENDIX B.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE PLAYS, ETC.

NOTWITHSTANDING the gossiping life of Shakspere by Nicholas Rowe, the fanciful biography of Charles Knight, and the various contributions made by Pope, Theobald, Farmer, Malone, Capel Dyce, Oldys, Drake, Collier, Hunter, Bell, De Quincey, Wheler Halliwell, and Staunton, the remark of Hallam still holds too truly, that of the man William Shakspere "we scarcely know any thing;" that "we see him—as far as we do see him—not in himself, but in a reflex image;" and that "to us he is scarcely a determined person, a substantial reality." His last biographer, Mr. Samuel Neil, to whom we are indebted for a critical examination of all the relative documents, remarks how difficult he and a friend, in the presence of the bust of the poet at Stratford-on-Avon, found it "to realise Shakspere in all the breadth, power, and geniality of his nature, as a visible presence among men; he seems so much more like an impersonality, a shape, a shade, a force, a voice, than as a form shrouded in a muddy vesture of decay, and as moving amid the casualties of time and space, possessed of all the attributes of man." As great difficulty has been experienced in fixing the date of his plays. The time when he began to write for the stage the commentators have left in doubt. "In leisure and affluence," says his latest biographer, or the latest that I have been able to consult, "he is reported, by tradition, to have produced two plays a year. That seems to have been about the average of Ben Jonson and of Philip Massinger; nor do Beaumont and Fletcher seem to have done more than four, on an average, between them. Unless, therefore, we assume an extraordinary speed and productivity in Shakspere, and that too while he had the duties of an actor and theatrical proprietor, as well as probably some other business in relation to his sales and purchases, we ought to have a good means of inferring, with some approximation to truth, the age at which the dramatist began his career. Meres' book was probably written some time before it was published—but let that pass—and he mentions, besides *Venus and Adonis*, *Lucrece*, and *Sonnets*,

no fewer than twelve plays, exclusive of *Pericles*, if it was Shakspere's, and of the three parts of *Henry VI.* We have, then, in 1598, sixteen plays, two lengthy poems, besides some sonnets, attributed to Shakspere at the age of thirty-four. If we average the production of plays to two each year (intercalating two years for the production of his other poems), we find a probable commencement about 1588;" [the reader will have perceived that I have found it *convenient* to date it three years earlier]—"though it is *likely to have reached even further back;*" —[even as I have found it reasonable to state that it really did] —"for we *can scarcely believe Greene's jealousy of a four years' old playwright to have been so speedily aroused, so soon intensified, or its occasion to have flashed so suddenly into fame.* Knight begins his chronology of Shakspere's plays in 1585;"—[which is also the date on which I have fixed]—"Malone in 1589; and between those periods the truth seems to lie."

As to the tragedy of *Hamlet*, the same judicious writer quotes the following from Henslowe's accounts in Dulwich College: "In the name of God. Amen, beginning at Newington, my lord Admirell men, and my lord chamberlen men, as followeth: 9 of June 1594; R^d^ at hamlet . . . viiis." The chamberlain's men were probably playing at Newington Butts while their own theatre, the Globe, was building; and this *may* have been Shakspere's play. In Lodge's *Wits Miserie, or the World's Madnesse*, 1596, "the Ghost who cried so miserably at the theatre, 'Hamlet, revenge,'" is mentioned; and in 1589, Nash, in Greene's *Menaphon*, says of some one (who?), "He will affoord you whole *Hamlets;* I should say, handfuls of *tragical* speeches." On which Mr. Neil shrewdly remarks: "It has been *supposed* Kyd wrote a *Hamlet*. It is *known* Shakspere did write one. Why should we not conclude that this *Hamlet* was an early production subsequently revived? It seems to us a feasible enough hypothesis." Such are some of the grounds on which I have given so early a date to the first sketch of *Hamlet*. I had arrived at this conclusion, I find, in the year 1849, in which year I constructed the Table given in the Introduction to this work.

APPENDIX C.

THE following was published in *The People's and Howitt's Journal*, August 1849, with the author's name, under the title of

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SHAKSPERE'S PLAYS.

NO. I. MACBETH.

A great desire on the part of the public now exists for the removal of those vitiations of the text of Shakspere which were introduced into the acting copies of his wonderful dramas by Cibber, Garrick, and Kemble, and for the restoration of the dramas themselves, as far as possible, to their original integrity, whenever revived for stage-purposes.

The removal of the theatrical monopoly, and consequent abolition of the patent houses, have now made it the manifest interest of smaller establishments in the north and west of London to concede to the popular demand. But in doing this, it cannot have escaped observation, that while many passages are restored to the stage, many others are omitted, at the arbitrary will of the management. Both these restorations and omissions excite different opinions in the audiences and the journals of the day. It becomes, therefore, a *practical* question to decide after what manner, and in what measure, the task of stage restoration shall be conducted. This can only be properly done by a *psychological* investigation of each drama proposed to be revived.

The importance of this task was specially impressed upon us by the questions to which the late revival of *Macbeth*, from the original text, gave occasion. Different persons blamed and praised the restoration of the drunken porter, the murder of Lady Macduff and her children, and the exhibition of Macbeth's head on a pole, by way of catastrophe and moral. Others, again, not without reason, regretted the absence of passages and scenes omitted. For all this discontent there is, we repeat, only one remedy, and that is, a thorough psychological investigation of the drama itself.

To *Macbeth*, besides, the kind of investigation proposed is singularly appropriate; for this drama is eminently a *psycho-*

logical production. "*Fate* and *metaphysical* aid" are the basis on which it is built.

The character of Macbeth itself is a psychological study. The future regicide, tyrant, and murderer is advisedly introduced to us in terms of high commendation—in a word, as all that is worthy and noble in the warrior and the man; and this with emphatic iteration:

"——Brave Macbeth (well he deserves the name)."
"——Valour's minion."——
"Valiant cousin! worthy gentleman!"
"Bellona's bridegroom."——
"Noble Macbeth."——
"My noble partner."——
"——Most worthy thane."——

Lady Macbeth also bears similar testimony to the generosity of her lord's general character and conduct. She speaks, indeed, of his nature as being "too full o' the milk of human kindness;" she owns that he "would be great," yet speaks of his ambition *negatively*. "Art *not* without ambition"—meanwhile positively affirming that he *is*, "without the illness should attend it." The noble thane was, up to that time, no convert to the jesuitical doctrine that "we may do ill that good shall come of it." As proof of the contrary, his lady thus apostrophises her absent husband:

"*What thou wouldst highly,*
That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
And yet wouldst wrongly win: thou'dst have, great Glamis:
That which cries, Thus thou must do, if thou have it;
And that which rather thou dost fear to do,
Thou wishest should be undone."

In accordance with this, we find that in the assassination of Duncan, the reluctant agent is constantly attended with remorse, and acts throughout as if compelled by an external motive, rather than prompted by an inward wish. Yet equally clear it is, that the murder of the old king had been long determined upon—long enough before the captain's meeting with the Weird Sisters on the blasted heath. *What* says he then?—

"My thought, whose *murder* yet is but fantastical,"

Why "*murder*"? why not some other thought? why did Macbeth yield to that suggestion "whose horrid image did unfix his

hair, and make his seated heart knock at his ribs, against the use of nature"? The answer lies in the implication of a pre-determination. Macbeth and his lady had, many a time and oft, speculated upon the means and opportunities they might have of removing the aged monarch. Hence the thought of murder is, with her likewise, the one exclusive thought. It is manifestly a fixed idea with both of them. This is the strong hold which the lady has on her lord; her fidelity to the fixed idea is placed in powerful contrast to his irresolution of purpose. She refers to their repeated and previous consultations on the subject, at times and places when occasion was less favourable than it is at present.

> "What boast was it
> That made you break this enterprise to me?
> When you durst do it, then you were a man;
> And to be more than what you were, you would
> Be so much more the man. *Nor time, nor place,*
> *Did then adhere,* and yet you would make both:
> They've made themselves, and that their fitness now
> Does unmake you. I have given suck; and know
> How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
> I would, while it was smiling in my face,
> Have plucked my nipple from its boneless gums,
> And dashed the brains out, *had I so sworn, as you*
> *Have done to this.*"

Opportunity gives the temptation; but the temptation had its root in a previous disposition and state of mind. The Weird Sisters themselves, we may now imagine, were rather the reflections of his inward mood than objective beings—rather, at any rate, interpreters of his thought—that "fantastical murder"—than its suggesters and primary authors.

Here are apparent inconsistencies which require solution—a cause in the background capable, when brought forward, of reconciling the contrary and conflicting elements of character and conduct. The slightest possible hint is all that is afforded in the drama; nevertheless, let us examine it carefully. The old king, wantoning, as he confesses, in the fulness of his joys, would scatter his honours on the worthy; but while doing so he politically profits by the occasion to make a proposition in favour of his son.

> "Know,
> We will establish our estate upon
> Our eldest, Malcolm, whom we name hereafter
> The prince of Cumberland."

Whereupon Macbeth exclaims,

> "The prince of Cumberland! That is a step
> On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap."

Only a short period previous to the reign of Duncan, the Scottish throne had been elective and successive. Buchanan, for instance, says, "They use to chuse the fittest, not the nearest." The plan of lineal succession had been established by a murder. This crime was committed by King Keneth on the son of King Duf, his brother, who had preceded him in the monarchy. Keneth wished to preserve the throne for his own issue; to preclude the possibility of any opposing claim, he poisoned Milcolm, the son of Duf, and then obtained the sanction of Parliament to an ordinance, appointing the succession in his line. Harrington has told the tale briefly, and adds:

"But the divine vengeance, which seldom, even in this life, passes by murder, overtook him; for he was ensnared by a lady whose son he had caused to be executed, and slain by an arrow out of an ambush she had laid."

There were contests for the succession, as might have been expected, after the death of the unrighteous Keneth. This is the state of things indicated in the few lines of Shakspere quoted. The poet adopts the historical idea, but he moulds the incidents to his own purpose. He changes the names of the historical persons. Duncan was not the name of the murdered monarch; being, instead, that of a bastard of Milcolm, who after the murder here attributed to Macbeth, reigned for a while; but, proving himself unfit for government, suffered decapitation. The monarch alluded to by the poet is in history named Milcolumb, of whom the story is shortly this, as told by Harrington:

"Milcolumb, who with various fortune fought many battles with the Danes, that under their king Sueno had invaded Scotland, in his latter time grew to such covetousness and oppression that all authors agree he was murdered; some say by confederacy with his servants; some by his kinsmen and competitors; some by the friends of a maid whom he had ravished. Donald his grandchild succeeded, a good-natured and inactive prince, who, with a stratagem of sleepy drink, destroyed a Danish army that had invaded and distressed him; but at last, being ensnared by his kinsman Macabeth (who was pricked forward by ambition, and a former vision of three women of a sour human shape

whereof one saluted him *Thane of Angus;* another, *Earl of Murray;* the third, *King*), he was beheaded."

By contrasting this historical summary with the poet's fable, we arrive more surely at the poet's meaning—at least illustrate it better—than by a simple examination of his play. It is true that Shakspere adopted, for the most part, Holinshed's version of the story; but it is clear he was not bound by it. Macbeth, it is acknowledged on all hands, was the next in blood to the throne; thus the elevation of Malcolm was an infringement of his rights that hastened on the murder of his father. But, according to Shakspere, the murder of the old king was determined on long previous to this wrong. We are to suppose that Macbeth himself had claims to the crown, which had been forcibly, or otherwise, set aside upon Duncan's accession, and that it had been the one thought of Macbeth and his lady how to recover their lost rights. This, somehow, they had determined on effecting—but awaited fitting opportunity. Meantime they temporised; and did this so effectually, that they stood in high favour with the usurping monarch. Duncan is pictured in the play in fair colours. Macbeth confesses that

> "this Duncan
> Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
> So clear in his great office,"

that there was but small excuse for his removal; a fact which shows the motive for temporising. The character of Duncan, notwithstanding, is selfish—extremely selfish. Even in the very moment of his gratitude, he so far forgets Macbeth's position as unintentionally to insult him with the elevation of his own son; or perhaps, takes the very opportunity of making the proposition itself, that Macbeth may not suppose from his extraordinary services, that he has *earned* a title to the succession. Having ventured on this step, he seeks to conciliate the man whom it may have offended. Hence his visit to the castle of Inverness, and his anxiety to manifest, rather ostentatiously, his regard for his disinherited, but well-deserving, kinsman. With this key, the following speeches of the king let us into his character:

> "O worthiest cousin!
> The *sin of my ingratitude* even now
> Was heavy on me: thou art so far before,
> That swiftest wing of recompense is slow
> To overtake thee. *Would thou hadst less deserved,*

> That the proportion both of thanks and payment
> Might have been mine! Only I have left to say,
> *More is thy due than more than all can pay.*"

The words are *literally* true. They are not the figurative and hyperbolical expressions of an amiable feeling on the part of Duncan, but of real mental embarrassment, which he seeks to get rid of by a political stratagem that conducts to his own assassination.

All this is *in* the play; but after a *symbolical* manner. A symbol is a representative portion of a thing substituted for the whole. A rhetorical dramatist would have told all this in long speeches. Shakspere contents himself with brief hints and obscure allusions. He takes care to *suggest* the state of circumstances, but avoids realising it. By such means, he has been able to get a prodigious amount of business into the first act of *Macbeth*, as also into those of *Hamlet* and *Coriolanus*. This power of symbolisation is the first requisite in the craft of the dramatist. By substituting suggestion for historical statement, more is conveyed than said, whereby the action is accelerated and tedium prevented. Enough, if the spectator be thrown by these minute and magic suggestions into the condition of mind to apprehend the character intended—all explanation is then superfluous.

We know that this doctrine will prove "hard nuts" for the modern playwright; but he must bear with us, nevertheless.

We have written thus much to intimate that, according to the Shaksperian idea, Macbeth is neither an ambitious usurper nor a vulgar murderer. He becomes both by fate and circumstance, but is neither by nature. There is that antagonism between disposition and destiny which, first of all, makes the character of Macbeth so strongly and mysteriously dramatic. The Weird Sisters are the representatives of this Destiny; they are *Valkyriæ*, or Fates. A severity of conception belongs to them, therefore, quite inconsistent with those operatic accompaniments which Davenant introduced into this great tragedy. Middleton's chorusses, which were transplanted from his drama into Shakspere's, were appropriate enough to Middleton's vulgar witches, but not to Shakspere's *fatal three*. These lyrical interpolations, together with Lock's music, fine as it is, have therefore been properly removed from the drama on its late revival (at Sadler's Wells);

thus restoring the purity though not the integrity of the text. No performer yet has, to our knowledge, rightly conceived the character of Macbeth. We miss in all the noble and *honest* bearing which should distinguish him at the beginning of the play. The actor has anticipated, in general, the period of the hero's temptation and fall. He has never thought of himself as the kinsman of the reigning monarch—nay, as himself the king *de jure*, though not *de facto*; but as a miserable wight labouring under a despicable influence—that of a domineering wife, who would incite him to suicide. The conduct of Lady Macbeth has no type in the life of the historical Macbeth, though her character has. The circumstances of the murder, and the behaviour of the lady, are borrowed from another story. Even Holinshed only says that "Macbeth slew the king at Inverness." But the same historian had also related the murder of King Duffe, by Donwald, captain of Forres' Castle; and the poet made use of the particulars of that murder to help out his conception of the one which he had undertaken to dramatise. By this means he has been enabled, in one and the same play, to embody the spirit of an entire era, as variously manifested in a series of historical narrations. This is a privilege which the poet fortunately possesses, but which properly is withheld from the historian.

The character and conduct of Lady Macbeth are composed out of the attributes given by Holinshed, first to the wife of Donwald, and secondly to the lady of Macbeth. The latter he describes as a woman "very ambitious, burning in unquenchable desire to bear the name of queen;"—the former, we are told, "devised the means whereby her husband might soonest accomplish the murder of Duffe,"—the consummation of which also is ascribed to her; and we are further told that Donwald "greatly abhorred the act in his heart." This same abhorrence, likewise, is attributed to Macbeth, whose remorse, however, arises from his *unwillingness to use such wrong means to attain even a righteous end.* Donwald also appears to have acted from a justifying motive.*

* Harrington's *Résumé* may here be profitably cited. "That which disturbed his (Duf's) five years' reign was the turbulency of the northern people, whom, when he had reduced and taken, with intent to make exemplary punishment, Donwald, the commander of the Castle of Forres, where he then lay, interceded for some of them; but being repulsed, and *exasperated by his wife*, after he had made all his servants drunk, slew him in his bed and buried him under a little bridge (lest the cutting of turfs might dis-

Shakspere was careful not to make a monster of Lady Macbeth. The players have for the most part taken all the pains they could to do so. Shakspere was solicitous to bring back Lady Macbeth to the stage after the discovery of the murder.

"*Enter* LADY MACBETH.

Lady M. What's the business,
That such a hideous trumpet calls to parley
The sleepers of the house? Speak, speak!
Macduff. O gentle lady,
'Tis not for you to hear what I can speak:
The repetition in a woman's ear
Would murder as it fell. O Banquo, Banquo,
Our royal master's murdered!
Lady M. Woe, alas!
What, in our house?
Banquo. Too cruel any where.
Dear Duff, I prithe contradict thyself,
And say it is not so."

All these speeches of Lady Macbeth, and what applies to them in the others, are omitted in the stage copies of the play. Look at the psychological nicety of her interrogatory, "What, in our house?" and of Banquo's answer, "Too cruel any where." How naturally it shows that her solicitude was to remove suspicion from "her house," not to express detestation of the murder. What a rebuke in Banquo's brief reply! Lady Macbeth's anxiety drew her to the scene. Doubtful of her husband's fortitude, she was present to supply, if needful, his deficiencies. But having heard his self-possessed defence of his conduct for slaying the king's chamberlains, she is satisfied of his ability to go through the piece. Then it is, and not before, she exclaims, "Help me hence, oh!" Her womanly feelings, also, return: her part is done —reaction commences—lassitude succeeds to excitement; and she is carried out, fainting.

One other omission, also, we have to notice—that of the drunken porter. His entrance is, in fact, the commencement of a new scene. The speech is highly characteristic. It has all the marks

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cover a grave) near Kilros Abbey; though others say he turned aside a river, and after he had buried him suffered it to take its former channel."

The reader will observe that the names slightly differ in the two authorities. Harrington's "Duf" is Holinshed's "Duffe," and Harrington's "Donald" is Holinshed's "Donwald." It is a mere and unimportant matter of orthography.

upon it of the fuming brain proper to a man who had been "carousing till the first cock," and who had been suddenly knocked up. His fancy conjures-up phantoms in the persons of his disturbers; and he assigns to them imaginary characters, showing, by the way, much of the Scotch metaphysical intellect in his passing remarks. He conceives, too, that they are knocking at hell-gate, and that he is the fiend who holds the keys. What can be more in harmony with the scene than such a horrible suggestion? At the same time it is full of humour, and serves, for a brief interval, to unpeg the mind, over-wrought by the awful incident of the preceding scene, and thus prepares it for a fresh start. Such a gleam of light thrown athwart the picture only deepens the surrounding darkness. It is surprising in the representation, when the porter was restored, how quickly the interruption was forgotten; nay, how slight the impression that his presence and words made while occupying the necessary interval. But reason requires that the interval shall be occupied, and demands of the poet that he should supply the means of transition from one point of effect to another. Nothing more admirably fitted for the purpose could be given than what Shakspere has invented; and any critical censure of the poet, for what he has here done, results from ignorance of his art. The true dramatist will estimate it at its true worth.

Macbeth having, against conviction, adopted wrong means, though for a rightful end, forthwith becomes degraded in his own esteem, and finds himself compelled to resort to new crimes for the support of a power obtained by crime. This is the great moral of the drama; and of this moral Macbeth himself is exhibited as being fully conscious. At once the fortitude and greatness of his mind come back to him; but these high attributes are no longer used for their former honest purposes. They must be employed in repairing the effects of his fault. And now he begins to show himself superior to his wife, whose conjugal fidelity blinds her to every consideration but her husband's fortune. She has not the same moral perceptions, nor does she recognise the necessity which is involving them both in the meshes of destruction. Macbeth therefore now acts on his own independent convictions; he no longer consults his wife; the murder of Banquo is studiously accomplished without her connivance; and, after a brief struggle with him for coöperation, she leaves him to his own courses. Of some of them she evidently disapproved. Her compassion

seems, in particular, to have been strongly excited by the fate of Macduff's poor wife. Her own feelings—strong as they had proved themselves—as the wife of Macbeth only served to increase her sympathy for the misfortunes of the poor deserted lady of the emigrant thane of Fife. In her somnolent scene the impression made by this event is carefully disclosed.

Nor was the poet himself less strongly affected by this portion of the melancholy story. He wished to make the most of that whereof the players, until lately, have determined that the least possible should be made. They (monstrous to think of!) cut out the part of Lady Macduff altogether, and thus deprived audiences of one of the most pathetic situations in Shakspere. The excuse is, that it is afterwards related, and therefore superfluous. Now, in the first place, nothing is related that the scene presents, but only what is supposed to have followed it. The scene is also expedient as a preparation for the passion of Macduff in the great pass of his agony. It will be recollected that in the climax of his grief he exclaims,

> "And I must be from thence!
> * * * * Did Heaven look on,
> And would not take their part? Sinful Macduff,
> They were all struck for thee! Naught that I am,
> Not for their own demerits, but for mine
> Fell slaughter on their souls."

This is the one circumstance that embitters the loss and sorrow. To it, as a ground of suspicion, Malcolm alludes at the opening of the scene. "Why," he demands—

> Why in that rawness left you wife and child
> (Those precious motives, those strong knots of love),
> Without leave-taking?"

It was, at best, but an equivocal act of duty, on which, if his country had claims, his family had still nearer and dearer ones. This we feel in the abstract, when the scene from which we have quoted is performed alone; but we feel it then, indeed, in a living manner, when it is preceded by that in which Lady Macduff herself appears. "What," she justly exclaims—

> "What had he done to make him fly the land? * * *
> His flight was madness. * * *
> To leave his wife, to leave his babes,
> His mansion, and his titles in a place
> From whence himself does fly? He loves us not;
> He wants the natural touch; for the poor wren,

The most diminutive of birds, will fight,
Her young ones in her nest, against the owl.
All is the fear, and nothing is the love;
As little is his wisdom, where the flight
So runs against all reason."

Here is the sting of the anguish, and such is the wise preparation made by the poet for driving it home to the heart. But this is followed by a dialogue between the deserted mother and her son, in which despair cheats and beguiles itself under the mask of playfulness; and thus, by the opposition of two feelings, begets a pathos singularly acute. How profound the despair is indicated by the mother's opening speech, in which she already looks upon her poor boy as an orphan:

"*L. Macduff.* Sirrah, your father's dead;
And what will you do now? How will you live?
Son. As birds do, mother.
L. Macd. What, with worms and flies?
Son. With what I get, I mean; and so do they.
L. Macd. Poor bird! thou'dst never fear the net nor lime,
The pitfall nor the gin.
Son. Why should I, mother? Poor birds they are not set for.
My father is not dead, for all your saying.
L. Macd. Yes, he is dead; how wilt thou do for a father?
Son. Nay, how will you do for a husband?
L. Macd. Why, I can buy me twenty at any market.
Son. Then you'll buy 'em to sell again.
L. Macd. Thou speak'st with all thy wit; and yet i' faith,
With wit enough for thee.
Son. Was my father traitor, mother?
L. Macd. Ay, that he was.
Son. What is a traitor?
L. Macd. Why, one that swears and lies.
Son. And be all traitors that do so?
L. Macd. Every one that does so is a traitor, and must be hanged.
Son. And must they all be hanged that swear and lie?
L. Macd. Every one.
Son. Who must hang them?
L. Macd. Why, the honest men.
Son. Then the liars and swearers are fools; for there are liars and swearers enough to beat the honest men and hang up them.
L. Macd. Now, God help thee, poor monkey! But how wilt thou do for a father?
Son. If he were dead, you'd weep for him: if you would not, it were a good sign that I should quickly have a new father.
L. Macd. Poor prattler, how thou talk'st!"

Hereupon enters a friendly messenger, announcing the approach of the murderers. This is one of those psychological situations in Shakspere, in which the fancy is called in to relieve the severer exercise of the imagination. The tragedy itself is a work of sublime imagination, and here a dash of the fantastic is thrown in, to vary and thus to enhance the effect. In reading, the whole scene, taken in combination, unlocks "the fount of sympathetic tears." Try to read it aloud from beginning to end, and, if you have sensibility, you will find it almost an impossible task. But the boy's satire is so keen, that you nevertheless smile through your tears. The laugh of the pit, accordingly, was dreaded, and the scene for that reason withheld from the stage. And now that it is restored does the expected laugh occur? Yes. But what then? how often in real life do we laugh and cry by turns at one and the same touching incident! Shakspere's dramatic art was in this a copy of nature's. Always with him the merry and the sad lie side by side, one to mitigate the other; witness the Gravedigger in *Hamlet*, and other instances. Why would we seek to be wiser than Shakspere and nature? For verily Pity and Humour are of the same household, and one of them is sister of Terror; what wonder, therefore, that the three should sometimes meet together! And, in what follows, the most terrible effect is produced by the performance that ever we recollect to have witnessed. The distracted mother, in her fears, utters a sentiment whereto what Macduff afterwards says is a pendant; we mean, "Did Heaven look on, and would not take their part?" as already quoted. For which, the following fine burst of expostulation, in the mouth of the forsaken wife, is the fitting preparation:

> "*L. Macduff.* Whither should I fly?
> I have done no harm. But I remember now
> I am in this *earthly* world; where to do harm
> Is often laudable; to do good, sometimes
> Accounted dangerous folly: *why* then, alas,
> *Do I put up that womanly defence*,
> To say I have done no harm?—What are these faces?"

The entrance of the murderers is the dreadful comment on the wild appeal, uttered, as it is, in one of those supreme moments when passion becomes oracular.

What has been written may serve to show the system of preparation on which Shakspere proceeded in the dramatic evolutions of passionate feeling. That this scene has at length been restored to the stage is a great gain.

But ought not the restoration to be carried further? For Shakspere himself thought that this very scene required preparation. Not only, therefore, does he make the tyrant announce his design upon Macduff's life, but is careful to introduce a dialogue describing the early progress of its execution. Our poet knew as well as the Italian Dante, that "haste mars all dignity of act;" and in this sublime tragedy was not willing to commit himself to any unseemly hurry. He therefore takes time to tell us by means of a dialogue between Lennox and another lord, that—

> "Macduff lives in disgrace. * * *
> The son of Duncan,
> From whom this tyrant holds due birth,
> Lives in the English court, and is received
> Of the most pious Edward with such grace,
> That the malevolence of fortune nothing
> Takes from his high respect. Thither Macduff
> Is gone to pray the holy king, on his aid
> To wake Northumberland and warlike Siward:
> That, by the help of these (with Him above
> To ratify the work), we may again
> Give to our tables meat, sleep to our nights;
> Free from our feasts and banquets bloody knives;
> Do faithful homage, and receive free honours,—
> All which we pine for now: and this report
> Hath so exasperate the king, that he
> Prepares for some attempt of war.
> *Len.* Sent he to Macduff?
> *Lord.* He did; and with an absolute *Sir, not I,*
> The cloudy messenger turns me his back,
> And hums, as who should say, *You'll rue the time*
> *That dogs me with this answer.*"

The restoration of this dialogue might have commenced the fourth act advantageously, and would have served to separate the two witch scenes, which now succeed without any intervention but that of the fall of the curtain. The clearness it throws upon the succeeding business would have amply compensated for any slowness in the action it might seem to produce. *Macbeth*, of all Shakspere's dramas, is the most rapid in action, and this slight impediment was no doubt designed to have its own artistic effect. All great artists have a point of *repose* in the picture.

So far, therefore, we find that in its course and construction this play, viewed from its psychological ground and in its psychological relations, is perfect. The consummate artist is throughout conspicuous. There is one omission, however, in which most would concur; the allusion to the power of the English monarch to cure "the evil," as the disease was called. This has been thought a tribute to the superstition of the time, or an adulation of the reigning authority. This may be; but if it were, the poet has controlled it into subserviency to his art. For, first of all, the hypothesis is in harmony with the spirit and subject of the play, and associates well with the wizard influence illustrated in it; and, secondly, is so managed as to conduce to a secret principle of antagonism which underlies many an effect in an elaborately constructed drama. To make our meaning clear we must quote the passage:

"*Enter a* Doctor.

Mal. Well, more anon.—Comes the king forth, I pray you?
Doctor. Ay, sir; there are a crew of wretched souls
That stay his cure: their malady convinces
The great assay of art; but at his touch—
Such sanctity has Heaven given his hand—
They presently amend.
Mal. I thank you, doctor. [*Exit Doctor.*
Macd. What is the disease he means?
Mal. 'Tis called the evil:
A most miraculous work in this *good king;*
Which often, since my here-remain in England,
I have seen him do. How he solicits Heaven,
Himself but knows; but strangely-visited people,
All swoln and ulcerous, pitiful to the eye,
The very despair of surgery, he cures;
Hanging a golden stamp about their necks,
Put on with holy prayers: and 'tis spoken,
To the succeeding royalty he leaves
The healing benediction. With this strange virtue,
He hath heavenly gift of prophecy;
And sundry blessings hang about his throne,
That speak him full of grace."

To perceive the principle at which we have hinted the reader must turn to the famous locution between Macbeth and the Doctor in the fifth act. Why two doctors in one play? Because it is as much a principle of art as of nature, that "all things should be made double, one over against another;" and further, because the

similarity of circumstance leads to a comparison or contrast of the two kings—the pious, healing Edward, and the usurping, destructive Macbeth.

An examination of the tragedy of *Macbeth*, such as we have given to it, strictly conducted on the true principles of psychological examination, leads to the conclusion that, on its thorough revival, not only will the Purity, but the Integrity, of the text be restored. An excision of an indelicate phrase or two may be perhaps permitted, as a concession to the infirmity of a modern audience; but such an exception can only serve to confirm the rule.

The revival which, in fact, gave occasion to these remarks was deserving of praise, more for what it had done than for what it had left undone. Among other things, the Shaksperian catastrophe was retained—the head of the slain tyrant, regicide, and murderer was exhibited ignominiously or triumphantly on a pole.

> "Behold where stands
> The usurper's cursed head: the time is free.

This may seem to be a matter of little importance either way; but consider it closely, and we shall find such a conclusion in harmony with the Shaksperian idea. After what we have written, the reader will not be likely to fall into the error of supposing Macbeth to have been naturally an ambitious man. He is no more ambitious than Othello is jealous. Iago is, in the one case, the jealous person; Lady Macbeth, in the other, is the ambitious one. So reluctant, indeed, is Macbeth to harbour ambition, when thereto incited by his lady, that the possibility of its influence fires him with indignation, and he arrays in opposition to it all moral motives, urging his duties not only as Duncan's "kinsman," but as "his subject," though in the latter relation only *de facto* such, as "strong both against the deed" to which he had been instigated. He therefore speaks with scorn and contempt of "ambition" as a "vaulting" rider that unskilfully "overleaps" his saddle to a deserved fall; and accordingly in his next colloquy with his wife, proposes, on that very ground, to abandon the long-cherished enterprise. Assuredly both Othello and Macbeth are the victims of an overwhelming temptation, and thereby convinced against their better judgment. Macbeth's crime consisted in his attempting to *hasten on a good end by evil means*, and it was

this jesuitical maxim which Shakspere, with that true Protestant feeling which he has so strongly expressed in his *King John*, sought to gibbet in the person of Macbeth the fanatic hero, like Loyola, of an expiring superstition. Had not Macbeth suffered himself to be tempted into the admission of this most pernicious of doctrines, he would have preserved the original nobility of his character, and perhaps obtained by safe means the recognition of his proper rights.

These remarks have gone far to prove that the tragedy of *Macbeth* is indeed, as a drama, a perfect work, susceptible of no improvement. To arrive at this result is the highest accomplishment of the critical faculty in relation to any true work of art; to find a fault is the meanest office of the mere professional critic; to detect beauties, and bring out the hidden harmonies of a production of genius, the privilege only of the highest taste. Of such a drama as *Macbeth*, the production on the stage should be guided by the same spirit. We doubt much whether the aid of spectacular accessories is needed to the extent now arrived at. Shakspere himself, as we have seen, was contented with symbolic suggestion; let the stage-manager be likewise therewith content. Such realisation as Mr. Phelps has, in imitation of Mr. Macready, attempted, produces the ill-effect of making us indifferent to the acting, and more attentive to the accessories than is prudent. Thus in a hasty but well-meant review, we find the critic objecting that Macbeth, at the banquet-scene, supports himself on the chair previously occupied by the ghost of Banquo, which the critic condemns as psychologically improper. Now Mr. Macready, not having attempted so elaborate a getting-up of *Macbeth*, escaped this censure, though he always, *immediately* after the *first* appearance and departure of the ghost, rushed to the chair and bore it with him forward, in order to seat himself near the front of the stage, while apparently giving way to his emotion. Mr. Phelps committed no such absurdity as this; and in what he really did, was indeed fully justifiable. It was not until after the *second* appearance and departure of the ghost that the actor just named made use of the chair previously tenanted by the horror of his own conscience. The second appearance of the ghost taking place in a *different* part of the hall, the *venue* (so to speak) of the aforesaid horror was changed; and as the guilty man would be naturally thinking of the ghost, and not of the chair, Macbeth's mental associations would remain

with the place to which they had last referred—that is, if they would remain any where at all—for, as we find, the disturbed soul of the conscience-stricken murderer actually wandered from one object and subject to another, until at length it settled down in a desperate determination to revisit the Weird Sisters. This brief remark may serve to show how needful is a psychological investigation of a great play, and all its adjuncts, both to the Actor and the Critic.

THE END.

LONDON:
ROBSON AND SON, GREAT NORTHERN PRINTING WORKS,
Pancras Road, N.W.